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Moving Beyond the Mask: The Progression of Women in Christina Rossetti's Poetry

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CHRISTINA ROSSETTI'S POETRY

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INTRODUCTION

Since the first of her poems were published over 125 years ago, critics have recognised and praised Christina Rossetti's poetical proficiency, and have indulged in writing seemingly endless pages of comentary and analysis. They have thus ensured that her genius will not go forgotten. They have also, however, created and perpetuated a view of Rossetti as a rather quiet, sickly, and intensely pious gentlewoman, whose misfortune it was to have been "unhappy in love." Stressing her strict High Church Anglicanism as The Reason for not marrying, few critics seem to have been able -- or seen the need -- to go any further. Similarly, scant attention has been paid to certain aspects of her work which do not immediately fit into the love death faded woman mold which has become the stereotypical image expected from her verse.

In this paper I will be concerned with one of these more neglected perspectives. I will be looking at the image of women as portrayed in Rossetti's non-devotional poetry, showing that, contrary to what I suppose could be called popular (literary) opinion, her women are often -- and increasingly so -- strong rather than weak, and that Rossetti herself was a conscious observer and critic of the "options" open to the Victorian woman. Given the emphasis that my work will take, I shall also be looking at various aspects of the poet's personal life, some of which have been largely ignored, and others, which, although generally considered by her critics and biographers, merit reinterpretation; I will be looking at them in a different light than that in which they have traditionally been regarded.

Central, also, to her portrayal of women is what Rosenblum has referred to as her use of "doubleness."[1] The veil or mask forced onto woman is not only a symbol of her oppression and the restrictions placed upon her. For Rossetti's women the mask/veil is often a form of protection which enables the woman to observe without herself being seen, to maintain some degree of inner personal integrity. All the while, however, the mirrors that surround many of her women serve as constant reminders that the only escape will often have to be inward; outside they are continually being scrutinised, objectified, framed. The wearing of a mask becomes vital, preventing the revelation of the unconforming living woman underneath -- in short, the unacceptable.

Throughout Rossetti's different portrayals of women, the feeling that no real happiness can emerge from a woman-man love relationship (and especially not if concluded in marriage), that a communication gap permanently exists between the sexes, and that societal norms for women are confining and wrong is continually reinforced. Her earlier, less aware women become more directly victims of the system as they unquestioningly fade away into the oblivion of death. Those women who have recognised the need to flint their faces hide behind masks, forced into concealing their secrets, their turbulent depths. Other women, notable those of her sister poems and the works of the early 1860s, have lifted the veils and begun to experience life first-hand, directly -- increasingly within a mini-community of women from which men are excepted. These continually changing and advancing images of women dispell -- even as some of them in an ironic sense embody -- the traditional picture of one of Rossetti's women: pale, passionless, and fading, on the brink of death because love/a man has failed her -- or she has failed him.

In her poems concerning women, Rossetti subjects the society-established and reinforced options available to women to a severe scrutiny, investigating the various ways in which women can accept or reject these "ideals" and "anti-ideals" both in terms of themselves and other women. Four general "categories" soon become apparent: the married woman, the spinster, the fallen woman, and the religious sister. (These are loose, catch-all terms, to which I will later return and define more clearly exactly what I mean by them.) Early in her writing career (ca. late 1840's), Rossetti first expresses dissatisfaction and then ultimately rejects the last of these options, concentrating instead on the less ethereal positions. In the poems of her middle period (ca. 1859-ca. 1865) Rossetti analyses the pros and cons of these three "positions" as well as their relationships to each other. Each is found to be in some way lacking, in some sense a betrayal or negation of the Self. The basis for this betrayal/negation is Rossetti's analysis of the woman-man relationship. Because in any variation of this relationship the woman is defined only in terms of man, Rossetti views the relationship itself as flawed, and therefore bad. Rossetti's poems about women, viewed in terms of a chronological continuum, become increasingly woman-centred, a trend which peaks with the so-called sister poems of 1859-60. No longer alone (as the women in her earlier poems usually are), in these later poems are compared to and interact with other women (and occasionally men), and it is by studying these comparisons and interactions that the flaw becomes apparent. Increasingly in her poems, the images of women become more clearly defined; they express their discontent -- although, initially, sometimes are unable to pinpoint the reason for this feeling --, and they increasingly have some kind of power, whether it be control over themselves, over men, or both.

PART I: THE MASK POEMS

Christina Rossetti's earliest poems that concern women are in several ways distinct form her later women-related poems. Simultaneously, however, they lay the groundwork for what is to follow for, as Rossetti becomes more aware of her situation as a woman -- and so, in several fundamental ways, the situation of all women -- she grew increasingly dissatisfied with and critical of the status quo. In her poems we witness the progression of her thoughts. In these earlier poems the key theme is that of renunciation, defined for the purpose of the works in this section in two parts as both (1) a withdrawal from life and (2) as self-denial. In her earliest poems Rossetti seems to have used both these definitions simultaneously. However, as her consciousness was slowly raised, Rossetti increasingly viewed withdrawal from life as the only way to prevent total self-denial: renunciation as a way of life (for her women) is used against itself. In this first section I shall be primarily concerned with her changing use of "renunciation" and the corresponding changes in her women in her poems from the late 1840s to the mid-1850s.

Because her poetry is in general so intensely personal, and because I will be reading the changes in her woman-related poems as the result of an increased feminist consciousness on Rossetti's part, a brief discussion of her life cannot be foregone. What I give here is a necessarily cursory account of her first thirty-five years (1830-1865), leaving the mention of any further relevant information to the discussion of a particular poem.

What emerges as perhaps most interesting in reading Rossetti's biographies -- especially in light of her "mask" poems -- is her much-discussed intensely passionate temperament as a young girl. Echoing his father's description of

her as vivace Christina, her brother William later remembered her as "the most fractious of the quartette: hardly more passionate than Gabriel, and more given to tantrums."[2] One account tells of her ripping up her arm with scissors following a scolding from her mother.

Yet her firey nature -- in her life if not in her poetry -- seems to have been subdued by the time she reached adolescence, and the calm serenity that was one of her chief characteristics as a woman was sometimes so distant as to have been termed "cold." The impetus behind this change seems to have been her mother's influence. It was Mrs. Rossetti who educated Christina and her older sister Maria, immersing them in the Bible, the Confessions of St. Augustine, and other religious works. As Maria grew up she, too, became increasingly pious, reinforcing her mother's religious teachings on her sister.[3] Other aspects of her mother's character complemented her religious twist, self-retiring and quiet, succeeded in instilling these "womanly virtues" in her youngest daughter.

Another important aspect of Rossetti's life was illness and death. In 1842, when Gabrielle Rossetti's eyesight began to fail him, the family was plunged into economic hardship, Maria was sent off to governess and a few years later Christina was deemed old enough to do the same. But Christina became ill -- most likely psychosomatically so[4] -- the illness brought on by her desire to avoid "the degredation of being a governess."[5] Throughout much of her younger life, Rossetti was to use sickness as an "out," the necessity of creating psychological sickness ending only with the onslaught of physiological ones which later plagued her life. The satisfaction she derived from her illnesses was peculiarly joyous, as is demonstrated here in an observation of William's:

> As an invalid she had courage, patience, even cheerfulness.

> I have even heard her dwell on the satisfaction -- such as it is -- of being ill and interdicted from active exertion.[6]

In addition to her own sicknesses, Rossetti was continually surrounded by the sicknesses and deaths of her family. As Bald observes, death was her norm, life the unreal, the interruption.[7]

But illness was not an "out" in itself. Exempt from many responsibilities, she retired into her writing, an activity she had engaged in since childhood. As an adolescent, she often played a timed verse-writing game with her two brothers called boutes rimés[8]; and in 1847 her grandfather Polidori had printed on his private press her first volume of poetry, entitled simply Verses. Though she later re-published (for public eyes) but four of the Verses poems, this boost to her poetic ego must have been considerable.

But in her earlier years, her views regarding her poetry-writing were, perhaps inevitably, ambivalent, given the model of selflessness to which the Victorian woman was supposed to aspire -- a model which could not help but come into conflict with the self-indulgence which, to some degree, is present in all acts of creativity. Her conflicting feelings are portrayed in her semi-autobiographical novella Maude.[9] Maude, a poet, is presented with three life options: spinsterhood, religious sisterhood, and marriage. The status of poet as an end -- a position -- in itself is never an acknowledged possibility, neither in Maude nor in Rossetti's poetical work. In the end of the book, Maude, following an accident on the way to her cousin Mary's wedding, rather inexplicably dies, leaving her "antiliterary and super ego-like cousin"[10] Agnes to bury most of her works with her. Of these verses, the omniscient narrator remarks that:

> it was the amazement of everyone what would make her poetry

> so broken-hearted, as was mostly the case. Some pronounced that she wrote foolishly about things she could not possibly understand; some wondered if she really had any secret source of uneasiness; while some simply put her down as affected. Perhaps there was a degree of truth in all these opinions. But I have said enough...[11]

Unwilling to make any further observations/commitments, the narrator, like Maude, like Rossetti, silently withdraws.

Two other interrelated events in Rossetti's life merit a quick mention here. The first is the forming of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB) in 1848. Although not allowed actual membership in the PRB, Rossetti was actively involved in its affairs, referring to her relationship with her brother Michael as a "double sisterhood."[12] Her poems were regularly read at PRB meetings -- after she had cautioned her brothers against exposing her too personal material -- and several were published in the PRB's literary organ, The Germ. It was also through the PRB that she met her first fiance, James Collinson, a rather dull young man described by one of Rossetti's biographers as possessing "no vices and hardly any virtues."[13] Unexciting though he obviously was, Collinson was also Rossetti's only hope from a life plagued with financial hardship and the constant threat of governessing. When she finally refused him marriage -- citing religious differences as the reason -- she made a courageous step toward independence. I read her final rejection of him, in 1850, not in the usual biographical sense of being forced by religious scruples to go against the desires of her heart, but rather as the beginning of an understanding of the shortcomings of a male-female relationship (especially one of "necessity" with so inadequate a partner as Collinson).

Association with the Brotherhood, and Dante Gabriel's simultaneous increased painting exertions, also gave Rossetti a new way of looking at herself and of

being looked at: painter's model. In this context she is best known as the Virgin Mary in his Ecce Ancilla Domini and The Girlhood of the Virgin Mary. However, her modeling capacities went far beyond these two examples. To Holman Hunt, "...Miss Christina was exactly the pure and docile-hearted damsel that her brother portrayed God's Virgin pre-elect to be."[14] That Rossetti became painfully aware of being constantly looked at, of having to live up to a model -- the above-quoted "ideal" -- is clear from many of the poems to which I shall shortly be coming.[15]

One last observation concludes my quick survey of Christina Rossetti's first thirty-five years. After 1854 there was a substantial rise in WMR's pay at the Excise Office which finally allowed the family a degree of financial security they had not experienced in a decade. This took pressure off Christina to earn money through governessing and/or through teaching. In the mid-1850s her brothers (and especially William) began to look into the possibilities of having a volume of her poems published, for they "would not accept her protestation of content with creativity itself."[16] Thus encouraged and financially secure, Christina Rossetti's situation came as close as possible to that prescribed by Virginia Woolf in A Room of One's Own.

Which brings me -- finally -- to a discussion of the poems themselves.

Several of Rossetti's earliest poems give the renunciation theme a special religious twist. Life on this earth is either abruptly ended or is slowly endured, as the woman looks forward to an after-life in heaven. In "A Portrait" (I-1850, II-1847, p. 286[17]), the latter is the case. The first sonnet describes the life prescribed for the all-renouncing angel on earth. Unlike the woman in "Repining" (1847, p. 9), the woman chooses a life of asectic austerity with

never a hint that she might long for "something more" out of life. But unlike the "happy happy maiden" of "The Martyr" (1846, p.91), there is no hint that this ascetic life is anything but bleak:

> She gave up beauty in her tender youth,
> Gave all her hope and joy and pleasant ways;
> She covered up her eyes lest they should gaze
> On vanity, and chose the bitter truth.

Beneath these words -- the actions of the woman in the poem -- there lies an anger -- on the part of the speaker -- that the "bitter truth" has to be chosen. For, although at this point Rossetti offers -- perhaps could ~~not~~ herself see -- no alternatives to this life of non-being, she was nevertheless not satisfied. The narrowness and restrictions of this life are stressed repeatedly: Eyes must be shielded lest some source of justification for her dissatisfaction be viewed. The "bitter truth" involves a total sacrifice of the Self, with the desired end that the woman "hate[s] all for love of Jesus Christ." In this section the adjective "calm" is used, but the harshness of the scenes of the life described, belie any real calm on the part of the writer. On the surface level, a life of religious renunciation is, if not enthusiastically advocated, at least viewed as perhaps the only alternative. On another, deeper level, however, there is an undeniable underlying anger that woman's life should be thus restricted.

In the second part (written 24 February, 1847, closer in time to "Repining" and "The Martyr"), the mood is considerably less fierce. In this portrait we view the woman dead, and here the adverb "calmly" does not seem out of place. After a life of frozen anger, "harsh [always] toward herself," the woman is finally at rest. In this chronologically earlier section, the poetic voice is far more sympathetic toward the woman, far more accepting of a life lost through renunciation, perhaps echoing the religious lessons given the poet. The woman is praised

for her purity -- purity maintained only through retreat from this post-lapsarian world:

> O lily flower, O gem of priceless worth,
> O dove with patient voice and patient eyes,
> O fruitful vine admid a land of dearth,
> O maid replete with loving purities,
> Thou bowedst down thy head with friends on earth
> To raise it with the saints in Paradise.

The ideas and tone of this section clearly does not quite mesh with those of the first. If one accepts WMR's explanation that it was written on the occasion of the death of Lady Isabella Howard, a woman much liked and admired by Christina, one must also take note of his questioning that "some of the stronger assertions in the first sonnet are not wholly applicable to the lady."[18] But whether one accepts his explanation or not, it is obvious that with the passing years, Rossetti's original passive and/or joyful acceptance of renunciation of this life for the next became less rewarding and happy, more a bitter necessity. Perhaps as she slowly realised that nun-like retirement from life, though an "option" society gave women was far from being a possible way of life for her.

After her earliest poems, this openly religious option was, for the most part, omitted from (what Rossetti herself defined as) her "non-devotional" work. Though many of her women continue to yearn for death, the after-life they envision is not the Paradise of "A Portrait," but rather the silent land encountered in morbid bleak detail in "Cobwebs."[19] In the death = oblivion notion implicit in these poems, we witness Rossetti's growing concern with the non-personhood accorded women by society. As the spokeswoman in "From the Antique" (1854, p. 312) complains, this "weary life" is "doubly blank in a woman's lot" -- and the only escape is in death.

In many of the poems which concern women of the 1850s, however, death as

an escape is not an option; the women in these poems simply withdraw from life into themselves. Key to the understanding of these retreat poems is Rosenblum's notion of the mask. As Rosenblum explains it, Rossetti personally felt the need to constantly "wear a mask" in order to maintain her integrity. This mask -- a fixed unemotional screen between the Self and the world -- gave Rossetti "the ability to observe without being noticed, to withdraw and mingle at the same time.[20] But the poet herself was not the only one to hide behind a mask. As Rossetti's women become increasingly aware of their situation -- the "ideal" acquiescing, unthinking Angel to which they are supposed to aspire and yet can-not -- they likewise increasingly protect themselves by wearing a mask, by presenting only the plastic ideal expected of them by society. Their retreat behind these masks is not at first complete, nor are all its dimensions and ramifications initially obvious. We witness in these poems a progression as the retreat/rejection (of life) becomes increasingly either a retreat or an awful living death.

An earlier poem which shows the beginning phases of this retreat in "Books in the Running Brooks" (1852, p. 303), a crucial piece in the development of Rossetti's poems that concern women. It raises issues and the possibilities of issues in greater number (and perhaps complexity) than those women-related poems which chronologically preceed it, while at the same time it is obviously an extension of the thoughts and themes of these earlier works. In "Books" a doubleness or duplicity already begins to emerge as the woman insists not only to others but even, in a desperate attempt at self-deception, to herself, that "it," this "weary" woman's life, is "enough." In "Books" the doubleness is very obvious; the only ambiguity lies in the woman's relationship with herself. That she dares not confront her feelings of dissatisfaction, that she necessitates the

wearing of a mask even in her moments alone with her Self -- dropping it only, briefly, in the most intimate of these moments -- demonstrates the alienating, destructive potentialities of mask-wearing, the drawbacks to Self-preservation which become more and more apparent. Thus the woman in this poem is a complex character, a figure midway between the unquestioning martyr and the strong women of later verse who has admitted her dissatisfaction and removed the mask. She is simultaneously both strong and weak.

"Books" exposes the truth behind the mask worn by the supposedly "ideal" woman. At the poem's beginning this socially correct consciousness insists to herself the fullness of her life:

> 'It is enough, enough,' one said,
> At play among the flowers:
> 'I spy a rose upon the thorn,
> A rainbow in the showers;
> I hear a merry chime of bells
> Ring out the passing hours.'

But the false mask starts to drop, and the woman finds it increasingly difficult to attempt to hold it up, finally having to admit to herself: "Not yet enough." Again the word "calm" arises, and with it the repressed energies hinted at in the first stanza of "A Portrait." Calm eyes are fixed upon the sky as she lies to herself and insists "it is enough." In the final, desperately questioning stanza the poetic voice asks: "Ah will it ever dawn, that day/When, calm for good or ill, Her heart shall say it is enough..." (emphasis mine). The emphasis is on calm, the steeling of oneself against oneself, the denial of one's natural inclination of which Rossetti was so aware:

> [From a letter to her sister-in-law, Lucy Rossetti, 24 August, 1883 :]
>
> "...it is such a triumph for ME to attain to philosophic calm that, even if that subdued temper is applied to me without common

> sense, 'color che sanno' may still congratulate me on some sort of improvement! Ask William, who knew me in my early stormy days: he could a tale unfold... I fear you may detect in me many an inconsistency..."[21]

But to return to the poem. As the stanzas progressively tell of the woman's doubts, the fountain which in the first stanza -- that one concerned with the ideal unnamed woman -- springs "from the daisied ground" (daisies signifying innocence), is gradually replaced by the ever-darkening waters of "the hither shore," the silent land of death intrudes more and more on the woman's world. Unlike the haven from life which "the twilight/That doth nor rise nor set" symbolises the death-hungry singer of "When I am Dead my Dearest" (1848, p. 290), here the "Cobwebsian" landscape, surrounded by "cold black waters," is viewed as a growing and inescapable menace. Death and woman's dissatisfaction with her weary lot are once again connected, here more terrifyingly so than in "From the Antique."

Moving on to the next stage of Rossetti's progression of increasingly strong (strength in apparent/outer weaknesses) women, the next poems I will look at concern themselves with an important sub-group of the frozen/unreal women who wear masks. Traditionally, aristocratic women have been regarded as especially distant, wearing more masks than their more "natural" sisters. (This comparison becomes especially clear when the women in these poems are compared to the country/outdoor women of some later poems. These women, far from society and all its artificial dictates, face considerably less restrictions than the noble women.)

A precursor of the distant noblewoman is what I term the Unreal woman, the woman who is "too good to be true" -- and hence is untouchable/unreal. A cursory look at "Annie" (1850, p. 301) will readily demonstrate this type of woman.

From the first lines, we learn that Annie embodies all the feminine virtues:

> Annie is fairer than her kith
> And kinder than her kin:
> Her eyes are like the open heaven
> Holy and pure from sin:
> Her heart is like an ordered house
> Good fairies harbour in.

She is horribly similar to the "ideal" of "Books." But her possession of these fine qualities -- undercut already by the mock-exalted tone conveyed by Rossetti's use of words -- is useless. Annie is so perfect as to be totally unapproachable: The "perfect rose," she will "scarce unclose." The sexual imagery is here unmistakable, although perhaps not totally conscious on Rossetti's part. Annie is, for all her kindness, cruelly kind; her inability to open up makes her less than human, a frozen ideal. Afraid of losing her place in heaven, she, like the Martyr-figure of "A Portrait," foresakes a complete life on earth. In the admiring praise for her, however, is now an undertone of frustration -- and of resentment.

This distant woman who cannot or will not open up reaches "perfection" in the person of the aristocratic lady. Although Rossetti poems feature several such women, I have chosen to discuss her "A Royal Princess" (1861, pp. 35-38), a poem of a slightly later date in which Rossetti finally moves beyond the wearing of the mask. As in several other noblewoman poems, Rossetti again presents the country-court split. However, in this poem the princess is not cold, "doing all from self respect" ("Is and Was," 1850, p. 300); from the poem's beginning she is identified with the more natural country life. "Deckt/with jewels, gilded, drest," surrounded by guards, she is a caged bird, a "poor dove that must not coo --/eagle that must not soar." Rossetti brings in both the most gentle of birds and the most majestic[23]: their mutual degredation of unnaturalness makes them equals. The fact that both birds refer to the same woman symbolise both

her "femininity" and her "strength," both denied by her confinement. As the poem progresses, this lonely confinement behind a false mask becomes increasingly clear; as she is everywhere forced to confront the unreal non-woman she is dressed up to be:

> All my walls are lost in mirrors,
> Whereupon I trace
> Self to right hand, self to left hand,
> Self in every place,
> Self-same solitary figure, self-same
> seeking face.

The princess's dissatisfaction with her lot is accompanied by a parallel rebellion against her life -- the life of the royal family -- by the people of the kingdom. Overhearing the truth -- "vulgar naked truth, ungarnished for/a royal ear" -- the princess finally resolves to remove the mask she has been wearing and join the (common) people. Deciding to take the gold thread which was to be used working "the last gold stitch into my veil of state" and instead distribute it among the people, she destroys that veil -- and, in effect, smashes the mirrors that stare at and enframe her. Her words, "I, if I perish -- that's the/goal I half conceive," testify to the dangers of removing the mask at the wrong time -- or at any time. For the princess, however, to finish the golden veil would mean certain and unnatural death. If she perish at the hands of the mob, at least she die as herself, all truths exposed. Unlike all the other aristocratic ladies, for the princess (whose tale carries a later date than most) self-truth is more important than even survival, if that survival mean wearing a death mask.

The investigation of the mask begun by the princess is continued in various ways by several of Rossetti's other women. "Dead Before Death" (1854, p. 313) and "In an Artist's Studio" (1856, p. 330) probe beneath the surface, exposing

with no uncertain anger the circumstances which force women to adopt masks.

"Dead Before Death" is one of Rossetti's strongest poems, full of stony anger and carefully controlled yet unmistakably harsh emotion. In this excellent sonnet the poet seems to be talking of herself, although WMR is quick to qualify the possibility of this.[24] The title conveys the general theme of the poem and the piece itself attests to Rosenblum's assertion that "the worst situation that Rossetti can imagine is to be caught in the fixed pose of death while still alive."[25] The poem is centred around paradoxes -- "changed, yet the same; much knowing, little wise --" -- paradoxes which serve to reinforce the essential doubleness which pervades the ideas behind the piece. The woman portrayed in this poem is, in effect, wearing a death mask while still alive; the death mask being the face which she is expected to present to herself and -- especially -- to others. Behind this mask she suffocates. The outer visible result is horrible enough -- an emotionless robot with "stiffened smiling lips and/cold calm eyes" -- but the resentment seething beneath the exterior is more awful still. The wrath felt at being forced into calmness, which has been obvious in many of Rossetti's women poems, here explodes as "the promise of days of old" becomes a reality. Looking behind the mask the narrator/Rossetti exposes the reason for the death mask: "the sham of life-long lies," and in this short expression alludes to all which has happened -- the stifled realisation that "it is not enough," the conditioning not to cry,[26] the misogynist teachings of Augustine and others which have been forcefully internalised: the "ancient mold" from which she has been unable to escape. In direct contrast to the "fruitful vine amid a land of dearth" which the self-sacrificing female in "A Portrait" (Part II) is described as, this frozen woman has ~~bourne~~ born "no fruitage," demonstrating Rossetti's new awareness that religious renunciation is <u>not</u> adequate compensation for life itself. Like

the sterile aristocratic women, like "Annie" who barely opens her bud, this life has been untrue to the woman. Her naturalness, her essential female sexuality has been denied, leaving only a shell "so cold and lost for evermore." Behind the mask, the woman has not maintained her integrity, as the women in other poems have been, to various degrees, able to. She has lost herself and is doomed to living the lie she is forced to continue.

"In an Artist's Studio" takes the dead-before-death notion a degree still further. In this poem the male is held specifically responsible for the many-faced/faceless woman's condition. Like a life-draining vampire "he feeds upon her face by day and night." The model is helpless to save herself. Like her precursor "Annie," her eyes are "kind," but here this kindness makes her more susceptible to the predatory actions of men, instead of driving them away. Like the royal princess the painter's model is surrounded by images of herself; indeed at times the meaning of the words leaves it ambiguous whether the "she" refers to a painting or to the actual woman. Painted in a variety of different roles, forced behind the masks of queen, country maid, saint, angel, there is no core Self left of the actual woman: "Every canvas means/The same one meaning, neither more nor less." The painter maintains his dream -- the "ideals" of womanhood into which he paints his model -- but by the process the woman is reduced to a shell, nothing remains but the memory of what she was and her empty eyes.

It is generally accepted that the painter and his model in "In an Artist's Studio" are Rossetti's brother Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his lover (and later wife) Elizabeth Siddal. Bearing this in mind, the poem becomes still more powerful, as the anger is given a specific and very close target. The Rossettis', and especially Christina's, polite dislike of Lizzy Siddal is generally known, but

despite this, as Rosenblum points out, "Rossetti's poem shows unusual compassion and insight"[27] into the model's situation. Also a one-time model for DGR, Rossetti had had first-hand and continuous experience in being an object, always being looked at, having to live up to a prefabricated idea.[28] Although there is no indication that she openly disliked or resented her brother, the half-concealed anger toward him and all men in this poem cannot be denied. As Ellen Moers points out with regard to "Goblin Market," it is no accident that the goblin men are described as "brothers" hinting at a connection with DGR and WMR.[29] When one extends the brotherhood of goblins to include all men -- who attempt to deceive women, who try to make women conform to their models -- the poet lays the groundwork for the rejection of man/men witnessed in the sister poems. As the causes of mask-wearing are more closely examined, so are, of necessity, the underlying dynamics of female-male relations. And these dynamics are increasingly seen in a negative light.

To briefly sum up the ideas and issues raised by the earlier woman poems considered in this section: Already in her earliest works, Rossetti displays an interest in woman's situation, which she soon sees to be one of self-denial. Throughout the late-1840s and the 1850s she continued to explore both the causes behind this subtly society-enforced self-negation and the various effects of these causes on woman. Early in this time, she seems to reject the austere life of religious sisterhood, realising that its rejection of life offers woman no real solutions. Thus confined to this life, her women are increasingly forced to wear "masks" -- frozen images of the face expected of them behind which they are able to maintain some degree of integrity and self-definition. But, as her women increasingly -- and angrily -- realise, these masks are also suffocating

devices from which escape can only rarely be envisioned. The poems in which the woman most directly confronts the causes of mask-wearing, however, do lay the basis for the removal of these masks; an action accomplished by the women of the "sister poems" of the next section.

PART II: THE SISTER POEMS

From the mid-1850s to the mid-1860s, Rossetti wrote a series of "sister poems," poems which focus on the position of and relationships between women, on both personal and societal levels. In these poems, Rossetti moves beyond the more self-exploratory and indulgent investigation of the single woman behind the mask, toward broader concerns, views and definitions of women in the context of society. Society, as Rossetti interprets it in these poems, offers the Victorian woman three roles or options -- the triangle of wife, spinster, and fallen woman. I use the image of the triangle rather than that of three separate, distinct points because, for Rossetti, the three positions are connected.

Her use of the "sister device" is important in understanding these connections. Various critics have viewed the sister poems as arising out of "a fragmented self moving or struggling toward harmony and balance."[30] The most indepth sister poems analyst is Winston Weathers who, like many, reads them within a psychological framework. He divides the poems into three basic groups: (1) those concerned with the divided self, which analyse the self into parts; (2) those which present the conflict within the self, or the potential for such a conflict; and (3) those which deal with some sort of integration of the parts. If one takes this psycho-analytical analysis of these poems and applies its basic concepts not to the

Individual -- Rossetti herself -- but rather to women-in-general, to all women, the connections between the women/definitions of the fallen-single-married women triangle become apparent. In enlarging Weathers' "sisterhood of self" to a larger Sisterhood (of all women), the poems take on a far more radical aspect, one which I believe Rossetti intended. For, as she became more aware of her position, she inevitably became increasingly aware that her situation -- the "weary" life -- was shared by all women.

In these poems she takes the weary life out of the abstract -- the timeless, placeless situation of most of the mask poems -- and places them in the context of women's positions in society. Just as the women in these poems are sisters -- implicitly if not explicitly -- and thus closely related, so are their positions to be likewise related. Indeed, the women in these positions can only be looked at in terms of each other -- they are defined in terms of and are reflections of half-hidden angles of, each other. One cannot exist -- that is, the concept of one cannot exist -- without the existence of the supposed-reality, or the concept, of the others. By "supposed-reality" I mean something akin to society's definition of each of the positions. The roles of spinster, wife, and fallen woman define not the woman, but the "ideal" or "anti-ideal" which she is supposed to represent.

Of course, these "ideals" and "anti-ideals" are defined and reinforced by society, and so -- because society is a male-dominated realm -- by men. It is thus not surprising that, although the sisters' positions are in one sense defined in terms of the similarities and differences which exist between them and the other positions, it is also true that these similarities and differences exist because, in themselves, the positions are defined in terms of the woman's relationship -- or lack thereof -- with a man. As long as

the woman continues to see herself as man's Other, to establish her identity in terms of a male companion, the boundaries between the women -- the differences between their roles -- continue to stand. However, as Rossetti's sister poems move through Weathers' three phases briefly outlined above, the barriers between the women break down, the "definitions" merge, and a larger Sisterhood -- often viewed as a mini-women's community -- is established. The establishment of such a Sisterhood is entirely dependent upon the rejection of the notion that women need men for self-definition. In these poems, the pushing aside of masks and speaking out is accompanied by a rejection of men and male views of women.

The logical starting-point for a discussion of the sister poems is "A Triad" (1856, p.329). In this poem Rossetti presents for the first time the fallen-married-single woman triangle, but at this early stage with no ambiguity or merging of the definitions. At the poem's start the three women can be loosely viewed as "sisters," or at least as having something in common: "Three sang of love <u>together</u>" (emphasis mine). But even in this commonality, they follow different paths, paths which lead to the three distinct roles. These roles, as I have said, remain distinct from each other, but already we see Rossetti altering the definitions somewhat in terms of the woman's portrayal in the poem in relation to the societal, or common, ideal.

This is most obvious in her description of the married woman. None of the three paths taken is portrayed in a particularly appealing light, yet it is the wife who appears the least desirable of all. She is "a sluggish wife" who "drone[s] like a fattened bee"; a revolting insect-like opposite to Patmore's Angel in the House, the "Temple [which] keeps its shrine/Sacred to heaven."[31] Although Patmore and Rossetti portray their married women

differently, the causes for their differing depictions are the same, viewed simply from different perspectives. A wife is defined as "a married woman, especially in relation to her husband."[32] This relationship is one of subordination, for despite the few legal rights women were to gain,[33] they continued to be defined both culturally and legally as the Other. Again I quote Patmore to give the romanticised male view of man's domination over woman:

> Should I to-morrow verily
> Be Bridegroom, and Honoria Bride?
> Should I, in simple fact, henceforth
> Live unconditionally lord
> .....
> Live one with her I worshipp'd, chain'd
> By links indissolubly wrought?[34]

It is precisely this glorified enslavement that Rossetti here rejects, refusing to place her unmarried woman on an unreal pedestal. That she was well aware of the unpopularity with which such a denial of the Angel would be met,[35] is apparent from her refusal to include it in her collected works. Of this action, W.M. Rossetti states:

> I don't remember having heard her make any express statement about her motives for burking Triad; but am clear that they preceeded more or less on a notion that the sonnet might be misconstrued, or unfavourably construed, from a moral point of view; the perfectly respectable wife...being evidently regarded with less sympathy than her less decorous colleagues. [36]

One would suppose that the least decorous of the "less decorous colleagues" to be the fallen woman, yet it is she whom Rossetti describes the most appealingly: "...one with lips/Crimson, with cheeks and bosom in a glow,/ Flushed to the yellow hair and finger tips." She is the first in a long line of increasingly "favoured" fallen women, women who "substituted sensual

pleasure for [the] frustration [of married women]."[37] For this, according to convention and society-in-general, she deserves censure and scorn, to be cast out of society itself. In this respect, many aspects of her situation are similar to those of the spinster, who also does not fit into society's mould[38]; they are both something of a Monster (to use Gilbert and Gubar's Angel/Monster dichotomy). But Rossetti increasingly portrays the fallen woman as victor rather than victim. The man who leads her to "sham[e] herself in love" becomes ever more frequently the object of the scorn, ultimately leading to his rejection (both by the women in the poems and by Rossetti, as she absents him from the piece altogether). It is interesting to note that, although the poem is obviously concerned with love -- and thus, for Rossetti at this point, with female-male relationships -- no man is mentioned. The "favour" with which the fallen woman is viewed can thus be connected with what I perceive to be the basic theme of the poem: that fulfillment in love -- read: with a man -- is not a real option. The fallen woman, through her "shame," avoids the mistakes of her two companions: she neither grows "gross in soulless love" nor dies from the mistaken belief that love is necessary for survival.

"Goblin Market" (1859, pp. 1-8) witnesses the breakdown of the single-fallen-married woman triangle, and with the removal of these barriers to sisterhood, a true community of women is for the first time attained. Poems subsequent to the writing of this landmark poem are often less concerned with the triangle -- definitions of woman in terms of man --, and more concerned with the creation, maintenance, and various aspects of the sisterhood -- woman defined in terms of woman. Of this larger sisterhood Nina Auerbach observes:

> Since a community of women is a furtive, unofficial, often underground entity, it can be defined by the complex, shifting, often contradictory attitudes it evokes. Each community defines itself as a 'distinct existence,' flourishing outside familiar categories and calling for a plurality of perspectives and judgements. [39]

Beginning in this poem and continuing in many others, Rossetti re-interprets woman's position in society, often substituting the new Sisterhood-derived definitions/positions for the old male-oriented ones. Common to all these poems is the rejection or absence of man, who is seen as an unwanted and/or unnecessary interlóper in the female community, sometimes a threat to its very existence.

In "Goblin Market" men as such -- that is, in a recognisable human form -- do not even enter the picture. The masculine sex is represented by the goblin brothers, which are viewed as the agents of corruption, corruption taking the form of sexual knowledge. Rossetti places a real emphasis on these goblin men, describing their sly, animal-like characteristics in great detail. With each sister's different perception of the goblins, however, she allows for a slightly different description, one which best conveys the role of the goblins at the given passage. The goblins are important not only as the personification ("goblinification"?) of the darker side of man, but also, of course, for the fruit they attempt to sell the sisters. Again, Rossetti goes to great lengths to describe the fruit in all its glory. For the fruit is not inherently evil. As many critics have pointed out, the forbidden fruit -- and this fruit is undeniably forbidden -- signifies some sort of temptation. But temptation and the act of succumbing to that temptation are not always bad or wrong, a point to which I shall shortly return.

At the beginning of the poem we already see that Laura is intent upon

tasting the goblins' fruit, and she soon does so. But is important to note that her actions are dictated not by the supernatural lures of the goblin merchants, but rather by her own free will. From the start, Laura is aware of what she is going to do, initially going so far as to deceive her alter-ego sister to achieve her chosen end:

> 'Lie close,' Laura said,
> Pricking up her golden head.
> We must not look at goblin men,
> We must not buy their fruits. (p.1)

Lizzy, upon discovering that her sister does not heed her own words, cautions her to do so, yet it is also true that she consciously leaves Laura, allowing her to make her own decision:

> 'No," said Lizzy: 'No, no, no;
> Their offers should not charm us,
> Their evil gifts would harm us.'
> She thrust a dimpled finger
> In each ear, shut eyes and ran:
> Curious Laura chose to linger. (p.2)

Similarly, it is Laura, not the goblin men, who "clipped a precious golden lock" in payment for their succulent goods. Thus, Laura effects her own rape of the lock, negating any ~~activity~~ passivity generally associated with such activity.

For by buying the goblin fruit, Laura is symbolically purchasing sexual knowledge, a knowledge which is most harmful when one is unaware of it. Rather than having her virginity/innocence taken from her, Laura willingly gives it, yet paradoxically does not know just what she is giving up. Thus, by becoming a "fallen woman," she moves from the realm of innocence into that of knowledge. But this knowledge can, at this point of the poem, still be used against her, as it was used against the deceased "third sister" Jeanie. Meeting her sister at the gate, Lizzy reminds her of Jeanie's fate, how she, after the initial tasting of the goblins' fruit:

...pined and pined away;
Sought them by night and day,
Found them no more, but dwindled
and grew grey;
Then fell with the first snow,
While to this day no grass will grow
Where she lies low:
I planted daisies there a year ago
That never blow. (p.3)

This description of Jeanie is ambiguous. In one sense she is a fallen woman, having tasted the goblins' fruit, a notion which is further reinforced by the daisies which never blow, symbolising the death of innocence. On the other hand, however, the picture of a grey, faded woman more closely resembles earlier descriptions of the unsatisfied spinster, the lonely woman who famishes for lack of love and/or dissatisfaction.[40] Jeanie's condition is simultaneously that of both the spinster and the fallen woman.

While Jeanie is cut off from the two sisters by death, however, no distinction is made between the fallen Laura and the pure/spinster Lizzy:

Golden head by golden head,
Like two pigeons in one nest
.....
Like two blossoms on one stem,
Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow,
.....
Cheek to cheek and breast to breast
Locked together in one nest. (p.3)

Together, they form the innocent/post-innocent whole embodied by Jeanie. Unlike Jeanie, however, they are portrayed in images of life and purity, already hinting the possibilities of Laura's fall.

Before the good, life-renewing possibilities can become a reality, Lizzy must join Laura in knowledge. Unlike her sister, she will not persue such knowledge out of curiosity; she finally makes the decision to buy the goblin fruits in an effort to "save" Laura. For the first time Lizzy begins to listen

and to look -- she emerges from behind her mask of innocence and determines to encounter the real world. In order for the sisters to survive -- and they must survive as a pair -- she must act consciously, with the deliberate knowledge that she is about to deceive the goblins. When the goblins perceive this, however, her task is made all the more difficult. For her non-acquiescence her rape is all the more brutal, as the goblins fight to take what they cannot have. Lizzy, however, remains

> Like a royal virgin town
> Topped with gilded dome and spire
> Close beleaguered by a fleet
> Mad to tug her standard down. (p.6)

Lizzy is able to defeat her goblin assailants at their own vicious game, for, unlike Laura, she knows exactly what she wants from the goblin men. While Laura somewhat erroneously believed the goblins to have something she -- as a "maid," a woman -- needed, it is obvious by this point of Lizzy that the situation is, in fact, the reverse. Like the painter of "In an Artist's Studio," the goblin brothers need constant renewal, achieved through the deaths of their victims. And just as the painter's model is supposed to be a praised "ideal," so do the goblins initially flatter their new victim, assuming her passive acquiescence to male domination, here taken to the extreme of death itself.

I say that Laura's assumption that the goblins have something she needs/wants is "somewhat" erroneous, because on one level she is correct. The actual presence of the goblin men attests to the fact that the fairytale-like world the sisters inhabit is dangerously close to the so-called real world, the reality of post-innocence sexual knowledge. In effect, therefore, to remain in an unfallen, or innocent, state is to be constantly vulnerable,

to be always in danger of hearing and seeing the goblin men. If, however, a woman fall -- that is, eat the proffered fruit without a clear understanding of the consequences of such an action -- a slow death arising from denial (of a second taste) is inevitable.

In "Goblin Market" the bonds ~~are~~ of sisterhood are irreversably forged when Lizzy returns to her fading counterpart bearing a new "bitter truth," the necessary goblin juices. Laura, not yet understanding that her sister has obtained goblin knowledge without surrendering herself, is both fearful (for Lizzy's life) and hopeful (for her own). What follows is an erotic description of the sisters' communion as Lizzy gives Laura the life-giving juices denied her by the goblin men:

> She clung about her sister,
> Kissed and kissed and kissed her:
> .....
> Shaking with anguish fear, and pain,
> She kissed and kissed her with a hungry mouth.
> .....
> Swift fire spread through her veins,
> knocked at her heart,
> Met the fire smouldering there
> And overbore its lesser flame;
> She gorged on bitterness without a name:
> .....
> She fell at last;
> Pleasure past and anguish past
> Is it death or is it life? (pp.7-8)

The answer is immediate: "Life out of death." Laura is saved from the near-death of the goblin-given juices by the sister-given second taste. This taste is of necessity scorching, for only through this purging -- the purging of the male-given juices -- are the last vestiges of male-control and definition effectively eliminated. In the final section of "Goblin Market" wee view the sisters "Days, weeks,months, years/Afterwards." Although both are now wives,

their husbands are not a reality, for only children are mentioned in this last domestic scene. It is as though the sisters are indeed married, but in a sense, to each other; that is, they are united in a sisterhood from which, apparently, even male children are excluded. The poem's closing lines demonstrate the strength of the now indissoluble bonds which maintain this new woman-defined community, made possible only through the conscious realisation that men are harmful rather than necessary to women's existence.

Two pieces which cannot be omitted from a discussion of Rossetti's sister poems are "Sister Maude" (ca. 1860, p.348) and "Noble Sisters" (towards Jan. 1860, pp.348-49). In these poems Rossetti brings two explicitly-named sisters into open conflict with each other, perhaps the most hostile and bitter conflicts in her work. The cause of discord in both the poems is the same: the involvement of one sister in a relationship with a man and the other sister's opposition to this. Although both poems conclude with the banishment of the man, in neither case is this conclusion a happy one. The former is resentful of Sister Maude's interference, while the latter is viewed as unnecessarily cruel, acting out of jealousy ("Sister Maude") or a vague conformity to patriarchal standards ("Noble Sisters"). These poems can thus -- and most obviously -- be viewed as studies in sororal conflict and division, showing, specifically, how the presence of a man can turn supposedly "noble" sisters into cat-like adversaries.

I believe, however, that a second related, albeit less apparent, reading of these poems is not only possible, but even necessary when one regards them in context with the other woman-identified poems from this same period. Taken as a whole, these poems explore the dynamics of sisterhood, many giving attention to the barriers which prevent its formation. Chief among these barriers is the presence of a man or men, with the accompanying danger that the single-

fallen-married woman "definitions" will either be re-established or prevented from being torn down in the first place. "Sister Maude" and "Noble Sisters" can be read as investigations of male presence and its effects on the women's community.

What makes these two works especially interesting is the fierce opposition to any demand that the first sister deny her lover. This is portrayed most strongly in "Noble Sisters." The dialogue between the two nameless women[42] reveals an opposition of interests far more sharply than does the monologue of "Sister Maude." As the poem progresses, the increased tension between sisters is accompanied and provoked by the increasingly human and masculine messengers sent by the lover. In the fourth stanza, the young man himself appears at the door, presenting the interfering second sister with a far greater threat than did the falcon, the hound, or the "pretty page." Rather than merely pushing him home, she instead tells him of her sister: "'Her husband loves her much/ And yet she loves him more.'--"

Thus, an ambiguous note regarding the first sister's marital position is introduced. Is she really married or did her sister lie? In the final stanza she replies:

> 'Fie, sister, fie, a wicked lie,
> A lie, a wicked lie!
> I have none other love but him,
> Nor will I have till I die.'

But again a question springs to mind: is the lie -- if it exists in the first place -- the fact that her sister said her love belonged to another man, or that she said she was married? A clear answer cannot be arrived at, but the possibility of a loveless marriage is there, giving a double meaning to the shaming-one's-father's-name idea. Whatever the case, however, the poem is set up -- as is "Sister Maude" -- so that our sympathies lie with the first

sister and her lover. When the sister Maude-type ends the poem with a hard-hearted condemnation of their love, the reader is, if not shocked, angry and perhaps even a bit confused. Upon first reading it seems more just that the lover-sister in "Sister Maude" should curse her sister: "'Bide you with death and sin,'" than that the sister Maude of "Noble Sisters" should conclude: "'Go seek in sorrow, sister/And find in sorrow, too:/If thus you shame our father's name/My curse go forth with you.'"

I think the fact that, regardless of what our expectations are built up to be, both poems ultimately reject the man is of far greater significance than is generally at first recognised. For it is this common thread which links "Sister Maude" and "Noble Sisters" with the other sister poems which Rossetti was writing at the time. Taking the "Goblin Market" concerns of woman-man relationships and the formulation of a community of women out of the fairy-tale-like glen and moving them into the world of society, Rossetti's women confront a new set of problems, and a new set of barriers to sisterhood. In the glen the women are taught first to fear the goblin men and then -- following the initial confrontation -- perversely to desire them. In society -- and perhaps especially the "high society" of the noble sisters -- the relationships between women and men are not as straight-forward. Woman in society is taught from the start to define herself in terms of man; it is a far more difficult and complicated matter to break away from this male-defined identity and forge a self-defined one within a Sisterhood. "Sister Maude" and "Noble Sisters" represent a necessary middle phase between the formation of the unreal (in the sense of fairytale-like in terms of characters and setting) Sisterhood in "Goblin Market" and the increasingly open denial/rejection of men in the poems of the early 1860s. While recognising the difficulties of establishing a community of

women in Victorian society, Rossetti simultaneously insisted that just such a community be formed. Although half the women in "Sister Maude" and "Noble Sisters" desire only to be with their men, while the other half scorn these men for questionable (feminist) reasons, the very fact that Rossetti wrote against society's biases and insisted upon the final banishment of the male lover, enabled her to move on toward a harsher, less ambiguous affirmation of woman's identity and independence in subsequent poems.

In these later poems, as has been said, the women proudly flaunt their new-found freedom, freedom from mask-wearing and the male-dominated society which necessitated this, "No, Thank You, John" (1860, p. 349) and "Promises Like Pie-Crust" (1861, pp. 350-51) present a new "type" of Rossetti woman. This woman finds life without man more than "enough," dismissing would-be suitors to ensure the maintenance of her integrity. In "No,Thank You, John" the tone is decidedly spicy, the words display a quick wit which is, however, not allowed to become too playful and thus betray the speaker's real purpose. In "Promises Like Pie-Crust" the saucy, bantering tone is dropped, leaving the firmness of resolve to further develope the theme of lost liberties through a relationship with a man. Any "promises" of fidelity are viewed as restricting to both partners, but especially so to the woman; only through friendship -- nothing more and nothing less -- it is suggested, can both women and men maintain their integrity and their Selves.

It is almost impossible to imagine one of the mask-wearing women of the previous section speaking so spiritedly and honestly with a man -- or, for that matter, with herself. As the women in the sister poems begin to examine their relationship vis-à-vis men, other women, and themselves, they become

progressively stronger. No longer subject to society-defined "ideals" and "anti-ideals," the women of these later poems are increasingly viewed in some sort of a female mini-community. While the existence and stability of this sub-community is often threatened by outsiders[43], in other poems -- those in which the women are most aware of their positions -- the sisterhood is viewed as increasingly strong and supportive.

CONCLUSION

Despite any dreams Gloria Steinem might have of gray-haired old women one day taking over the earth[44], Christina Rossetti would never number herself among such an army. As Rossetti aged, she became increasingly religious[45] and conservative in her outlook; her one-time liberating/feminist views of women -- when she wrote of non-religious women at all -- took a sharp turn toward the "traditional." "A Helpmeet for Him" (B. 1891, p. 415) demonstrates the tremendous change in her consciousness after the years of the sister poems.[46] By the writing of this poem, the sisterhood or mini-community of women had dissolved without a trace. Once again, the woman is defined in terms of a man, but here she is more completely and undeniably the Other than in any previous work considered. A hint of the earlier masked woman does remain -- "Her strength with weakness is overlaid;/Meek compliances veil her might" -- but there is no corresponding hint of dissatisfaction and/or frustration and/or resentment. This poem is a depressingly joyful celebration of woman's "inferiority," her eternal confinement to "the lowest room."

But such depression was not the topic of this paper. To briefly reiterate, the women in her non-devotional poems become increasingly strong, self-defined, and independent. The road to this independence is not an easy one. In her earliest

poems, we witness the faintest glimmerings of dissatisfaction or rebellion crushed, usually through the promise of an after-life in heaven. By 1850, however, Rossetti's women are becoming cynical of this promised Paradise: they begin to concern themselves with this life -- and find it lacking. The veiled anger and dissatisfaction they feel is at first barely acknowledged by the woman herself, but as Rossetti's women grow throughout the 1850s the frustration and rage, although contained behind the flint-faced mask the woman never removes, like-wise grow. The erruption of Rossetti's own repressed anger in these poems places them among the most powerful in her non-devotional work.

As the repressed emotions of her "masked women" grows, however, Rossetti begins to discover a new "out," one far healthier then that of illness. From the late-1850s to the mid-1860s Rossetti's women are seen less alone, in solitary confinement, and increasingly in the company of others. These women channel the pent-up energies of their mask sisters into a careful scrutiny of the positions into which society puts women. These are found to be inadequate and stifling, and as the women realise the extent to which this is true, they are able to reject the conventional male-defined positions for women -- and the men themselves -- often finding refuge in some sort of a mini-community of women, from which men are denied access.

I feel that this way of looking at these poems is valid as it sheds a new light of Rossetti's work. As stated briefly in the Introduction, her work has often been misinterpreted by critics too anxious to re-assert what has already been said, to be able to look at the poems objectively. Prejudices and biases are hard to overcome. As McGann points out, feminist criticism has, with few exceptions, ignored Rossetti's work, in large part due to her reactionary views on the Woman Question.[47] Their inability -- or lack of desire -- to

probe beneath these views prevents them from discovering how truly "feminist" Rossetti could be in the non-legal sphere. A similar situation is also true when one considers the light in which the sister poems have traditionally been regarded. In their obsession to obtain yet a closer grasp on Rossetti's psyche, most critics have been unable to interpret these poems from anything but a psychological, individual-focused viewpoint, and have almost inevitably returned to her "love affairs" and/or her relationship with her sister Maria. Their additions to Rossetti criticism, while undeniably valuable, are, nonetheless, often narrow. I feel that less traditional interpretations of Rossetti's poetry -- whether "right" or "wrong" it does not initially matter -- must be offered, for only with continuous infusions of literary new blood will the traditional, often false, stereotype of Rossetti and her work be erased. In this paper I have -- I hope -- made a step in that direction.

Notes

[1]See: Dolores Rosenblum, "Christina Rossetti: The Inward Pose," in Shakespeare's Sisters, ed. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 82-98.

[2]William M. Rossetti, Some Reminiscences (London: n.p., 1906), I, p. 18, as quoted in Eleanor Walter Thomas, Christina Georgina Rossetti (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), p. 17.

[3]In Christina Rossetti published for the British Council and the National Book League (London: Longman, Greens and Co., 1965), p. 7, Georgina Battiscombe explains their religion as: "Anglicanism...of a special kind, the intensely serious, sober religion of the early years of the Oxford Movement...austre, ever ascetic, and very rigid, yet at the same time glowing with the fire of the Romantic Revival."

[4]See: James A. Kohl, "A Medical Comment on Christina Rossetti," Notes and Queries, 15 (1968), 423-24.

[5]Mary Wollstonecraft, Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792), as quoted in Elizabeth Longford, Eminent Victorian Women (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), p. 11.

[6]William M. Rossetti, as quoted in Stanley Weintraub, Four Rossettis (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1977), p. 17. Along the same lines, CR wrote to WMR, 13 November, 1855, The Family Letters of Christina Georgina Rossetti, ed. William M. Rossetti (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), p. 24:

> "I hope you are glad to know that I am very comfortable in my exile; but at any rate I am rejoiced to feel that my health does really unfit me for miscellaneous governess-ing en permanence. For instance yesterday I indulged

> in breakfast in bed, having been very unwell the day previous: now I am very tolerable again, but I do not feel particularly to be depended upon."

[7]Marjory A. Bald, "Christina Rossetti" in Women-Writer of the Nineteenth Century (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), p. 233.

[8]For more information, see: R.W. Crump, "Eighteen Movements/Monuments: Christina Rossetti's Boutes-Rimes Sonnets in the Troxell Collection," in Essays on the Rossettis, ed. Robert S. Fraser (Princeton: Princeton University Library, 1972), pp. 210-29.

[9]That she did not want these feelings made public is obvious from Maude's history. Written 1848-50, it was not published until 1897, three years after Rossetti's death. Although aesthetic considerations undeniably must have had some connection with her lack of desire to publish it, so too, must her generally known dislike of having her private life made public played a part.

[10]Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar Madwoman in the Attic (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 551.

[11]Christina Rossetti, Maude: Prose and Verse (Chicago: Herbert S. Stone and Company, 1897), pp. 11-12.

[12]Christina Rossetti, quoted in Weintraub, p. 38. By this remark she meant both her familial position and her position as "Pre-Raphaelite Sister."

[13]Dorothy Margaret Stuart, Christina Rossetti (London: Macmillam and Co., Ltd., 1931), p. 25.

[14]Holman Hunt, quoted in Weintraub, p. 33.

[15]Also see Rosenblum on this.

[16]Weintraub, p. 102.

[17]All page numbers refer to the 1908 volume of Rossetti's poems, edited by WMR.

[18]William M. Rossetti, Notes, The Poetical Works of Christina Georgina Rossetti, (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1908), p. 477.

[19]"Cobwebs" (1855, p. 317)

It is a land with neither night nor day,
Nor heat nor cold, nor any wind
nor rain,
Nor hills nor valleys: but one
even plain
Stretches through long unbroken
miles away,
While through the sluggish air a
twilight grey
Broodeth: no moons or seasons
wax and wane,
No ebb and flow are there along
the main,
No bud-time, no leaf-falling, there
for aye:--
No ripple on the sea, no shifting
sand,
No beat of wings to stir the
stagnant space:
No pulse of life through all the
loveless land
And loveless sea; no trace of days
before,
No guarded home, no toil-won
resting-place,
No future hope, no fear for evermore.

[20]See Rosenblum.

[21]Christina Rossetti to Lucy Rossetti, 24 August, 1883, The Family Letters of Christina Georgina Rossetti, p. 138.

[22]For example, see "Is and Was" (1850, p. 300)

[23]According to Ellen Moers in Literary Women (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1976), p. 246, the eagle and the dove are the most common pair of birds in women's writing. She goes on to state that "the more feminist the literary conception...the larger, wilder, and crueller come the birds."

[24] W.M. Rossetti, Notes, p. 479:

> "I am unable to say what gave rise to this very intense and denuncitory outpouring...possibly it may be regarded as an address to herself -- not indeed as she was, or even supposed herself to be, but as she might have become if 'Amor Mundi' were to supercede the aspiration for divine grace."

[25]Rosenblum, p. 91

[26]"Three Moments" (1850, p. 299) portrays the process of acquiring the mask the woman's gradual loss of ability to cry. Trained by her mother -- who herself displays some regret if not anger at this "inevitable" loss -- by the poem's final scene, the woman has to cry out:

> "...O Mother, where are they,
> The tears that once used to flow
> So easily? One single drop
> Might save my reason now, or stop
> My heart from breaking."

[27]Rosenblum, p. 88.

[28]In "Some Reminiscences of Christina Rossetti," Atlantic Monthly, 75 (1895) 738, William Sharp writes (From first-hand knoweledge) that even in her later years CR was never unaware of her looks and of being looked at. Upon meeting CR, he was impressed with "the rapid, almost furtive way in which she had drawn her veil over her too conspicuous eyes as soon as the room was lighted, and her concurrent haste to be gone."

[29]Moers, p. 106.

[30]Winston Weathers, "Christina Rossetti: The Sisterhood of Self," Victorian Poetry, 3 (1965), 81.

[31]Coventry Patmore, The Angel in the House, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1863), p. 298.

[32]The Oxford Concise Dictionary, 6th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 1333. Emphasis mine.

[33]For example, the first Married Woman's Property Act was passed one year

after the writing of this poem, in 1857.

[34]Patmore, pp. 280-81.

[35]The Angel in the House, incidently, was begun by Patmore in 1854, however, was not completed until eight years later, being published in parts as it was written. I use it here not as an isolated instance of poetic endorsement of women's separate sphere, but rather as The Poem which tupifies the Victorian ideal of womanhood pervasive during Rossetti's lifetime.

[36]William M. Rossetti quoted in Mackenzie Bell, Christina Rossetti: A Biographical and Critical Study (Boston: John Wilson and Son, 1898), pp. 237-38.

[37]Jerome J. McGann, "Christina Rossetti's Poems: A New Edition and a Revaluation," Victorian Studies, 23 (1980), 245.

[38]Witness the excess of "Surplus Women" in Victorian England.

[39]Nina Auerbach, Communities of Women (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 11.

[40]See, for example, the dissatisfied spinster in "The Lowest Room" (1856, pp. 16-20)

[41]See this sister's last words. Her concern with her sisters "clean" name/honour is dictated by her regarding this honour as an extension of her father's property.

[42]The naming or not-naming of sisters is a device used by Rossetti to further reinforce a situation of personal closeness or distance in a given poem. That we are given the name of only one sister in "Sister Maude" and no names in "Noble Sisters" is indicative of the sisters' state of conflict. In contrast, in poems with more pleasant outcomes, or which show greater solidarity between the women, the sisters are not only named, but these names are alliterative. See, for example, "Goblin Market" (Laura and Lizzy), "Maiden Song" (Meggan, May, and Margaret), and "A Ring Posey" (in which the two similar sisters Jess and Jill are placed

opposite to a separate, nameless third woman).

[43]See, for example, "The Inequity of the Fathers Upon the Children" (1865, pp. 41-47). In this poem Margaret's small community of women is threatened by several sources: the visitors, her mother's painful memory of her father which necessitates her wearing a mask, the hypocritical church-goers. Despite all this however, Margaret vows to remain true to herself, taking pride in her "shame." This last stance is similar to that of the speaker of "Cousin Kate" (1859, p. 347) and the concerned, and ultimately defiant, voice in "Margery" (1863, p. 359). Interesting also is that all three poems exhibit an increasing sympathy for the so-called fallen woman.

[44] In reference to a joke made by Gloria Steimem, "Feminism vs. Authoritarianism," Finney Chapel, Oberlin, Ohio, 19 April, 1982, following up an assertion that as women age they often become more radical than in their youth.

[45] According to Leder's abstract, "In Rossetti's later poems (after 1866) ...the focus is less on character in relationship to situation and more on devotional themes. Sharon Leder, "The Image of Woman in Christina Rossetti's Poetry," DAI, 40 (1979), 5875A (New York University).

[46]No adequate explanation is known for this change.

[47] McGann, 237.

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HEAVEN OVERARCHES

HEAVEN overarches earth and sea,
Earth-sadness and sea-bitterness.
Heaven overarches you and me:
A little while and we shall be—
Please God—where there is no more sea
Nor barren wilderness.

Heaven overarches you and me,
And all earth's gardens and her graves.
Look up with me, until we see
The day break and the shadows flee.
What though to-night wrecks you and me
If so to-morrow saves?

Circa 1893.

GENERAL POEMS

A PORTRAIT

1

SHE gave up beauty in her tender youth,
Gave all her hope and joy and pleasant ways;
She covered up her eyes lest they should gaze
On vanity, and chose the bitter truth.
Harsh towards herself, towards others full of ruth,
Servant of servants, little known to praise,
Long prayers and fasts trenched on her nights and days:
She schooled herself to sights and sounds uncouth
That with the poor and stricken she might make
A home, until the least of all sufficed
Her wants; her own self learned she to forsake,
Counting all earthly gain but hurt and loss.
So with calm will she chose and bore the cross
And hated all for love of Jesus Christ.

21 *November* 1850.

2

They knelt in silent anguish by her bed,
And could not weep; but calm there she lay.
All pain had left her; and the sun's last ray
Shone through upon her, warming into red
The shady curtains. In her heart she said:
'Heaven opens; I leave them and go away;

The Bridegroom calls,—shall the Bride seek to stay?'
Then low upon her breast she bowed her head.
O lily flower, O gem of priceless worth,
O dove with patient voice and patient eyes,
O fruitful vine amid a land of dearth,
O maid replete with loving purities,
Thou bowedst down thy head with friends on earth
To raise it with the saints in Paradise.

11 *February* 1847.

THE WHOLE HEAD IS SICK AND THE WHOLE HEART FAINT.

Woe for the young who say that life is long,
Who turn from the sun-rising to the West,
Who feel no pleasure and can find no rest,
Who in the morning sigh for even-song.
Their hearts, weary because of this world's wrong,
Yearn with a thousand longings unexprest;
They have a wound no mortal ever drest,
No all than all earth's remedies more strong.
For them the fount of gladness hath run dry,
And in all Nature is no pleasant thing;
For them there is no glory in the sky,
No sweetness in the breezes' murmuring:
They say, 'The peace of heaven is placed too high,
And this earth changeth and is perishing.'

6 *December* 1847.

VANITY OF VANITIES

AH woe is me for pleasure that is vain,
Ah woe is me for glory that is past!
Pleasure that bringeth sorrow at the last,
Glory that at the last bringeth no gain.
So saith the sinking heart; and so again
It shall say till the mighty angel-blast
Is blown, making the sun and moon aghast,
And showering down the stars like sudden rain.
And evermore men shall go fearfully,
Bending beneath their weight of heaviness;
And ancient men shall lie down wearily,
And strong men shall rise up in weariness:
Yea even the young shall answer sighingly,
Saying one to another 'How vain it is!'

1847.

Nay she is worth much more than
flowers that fade,
And yet shall be made faint with
purple fruit:
Branch of the Living Vine, whose
Root
From all eternity is laid.
Another Sun
Than this of ours
Has withered up indeed her
flowers
But ripened her grapes every one.
18 *January* 1851.

A SUMMER WISH

LIVE all thy sweet life through,
Sweet Rose, dew-sprent,
Drop down thine evening dew,
To gather it anew
When day is bright:
I fancy thou wast meant
Chiefly to give delight.

Sing in the silent sky,
Glad soaring bird;
Sing out thy notes on high
To sunbeam straying by
Or passing cloud;
Heedless if thou art heard,
Sing thy full song aloud.

Oh that it were with me
As with the flower!
Blooming on its own tree
For butterfly and bee
Its summer morns:
That I might bloom mine hour,
A rose in spite of thorns.

Oh that my work were done
As birds' that soar
Rejoicing in the sun:
That when my time is run
And daylight too,
I so might rest once more
Cool with refreshing dew.
21 *June* 1851.

SONG

IT is not for her even brow
And shining yellow hair,
But it is for her tender eyes
I think my love so fair:
Her tell-tale eyes that smile and
weep
As frankly as they wake and sleep.

It is not for her rounded cheek
I love and fain would win,
But it is for the blush that comes
Straight from the heart within:
The honest blush of maiden shame
That blushes without thought of
blame.

So in my dreams I never hear
Her song, although she sings
As if a choir of spirits swept
From earth with throbbing
wings:
I only hear the simple voice
Whose love makes many hearts
rejoice.
1851.

A FAIR WORLD THOUGH A FALLEN

YOU tell me that the world is fair
in spite
Of the old Fall; and that I
should not turn
So to the grave, and let my spirit
yearn

After the quiet of the long last
night.
Have I then shut mine eyes against
the light,
Grief-deafened lest my spirit
should discern?
Yet how could I keep silence
when I burn?
And who can give me comfort?—
Hear the right.
Have patience with the weak and
sick at heart:
Bind up the wounded with a
tender touch,
Comfort the sad, tear-blinded
as they go:—
For, though I failed to choose the
better part,
Were it a less unutterable woe
If we should come to love this
world too much?
30 *August* 1851.

BOOKS IN THE RUNNING BROOKS

'IT is enough, enough,' one said,
At play among the flowers:
'I spy a rose upon the thorn,
A rainbow in the showers;
I hear a merry chime of bells
Ring out the passing hours.'
Soft springs the fountain
From the daisied ground,
Softly falling on the moss
Without a sound.

'It is enough,' she said, and fixed
Calm eyes upon the sky:
'I watch a flitting tender cloud
Just like a dove go by;
A lark is rising from the grass,
A wren is building nigh.'
Softly the fountain
Threads its silver way,
Screened by the scented bloom
Of whitest May.

'Enough?' she whispered to her-
self,
As doubting: 'Is it so?
Enough to wear the roses fair,
Oh sweetest flowers that blow?
Oh yes, it surely is enough—
My happy home below!'
A shadow stretcheth
From the hither shore:
The waters darken
More and more and more.

'It is enough,' she says; but with
A listless weary moan:
'Enough,' if mixing with her
friends:
'Enough,' if left alone;
But to herself: 'Not yet enough
This suffering, to atone?'
The cold black waters
Seem to stagnate there,
Without a single wave
Or breath of air.

And now she says: 'It is enough,'
Half languid and half stirred:
'Enough,' to silence and to
sound,
Thorn, blossom, soaring bird:
'Enough,' she says; but with a
lack
Of something in the word.
Defiled and turbid
See the waters pass,
Half light, half shadow,
Struggling through the grass.

Ah will it ever dawn, that day
When, calm for good or ill,

Her heart shall say: 'It is enough,
For Thou art with me still;
It is enough, O Lord my God,
Thine only blessed Will'?
Then shall the fountain sing
And flow to rest,
Clear as the sun-track
To the purple West.

26 *August* 1852.

THE SUMMER IS ENDED

WREATHE no more lilies in my hair,
For I am dying, Sister sweet:
Or, if you will for the last time
Indeed, why make me fair
Once for my winding-sheet.

Pluck no more roses for my breast,
For I like them fade in my prime:
Or, if you will, why pluck them still,
That they may share my rest
Once more for the last time.

Weep not for me when I am gone,
Dear tender one, but hope and smile:
Or, if you cannot choose but weep,
A little while weep on,
Only a little while.

11 *September* 1852.

AFTER ALL

'I THOUGHT your search was over.'
—'So I thought.'
'But you are seeking still.'—'Yes, even so:
Still seeking in mine own despite below
That which in heaven alone is found unsought:
Still spending for that thing which is not bought.'
'Then chase no more this shifting empty show.'—
'Amen: so bid a drowning man forego
The straw he clutches: will he so be taught?
You have a home where peace broods like a dove,
Screened from the weary world's loud discontent:
You have home here: you wait for home above.
I must unlearn the pleasant ways I went:
Must learn another hope, another love,
And sigh indeed for home in banishment.'

24 *October* 1852.

FROM THE ANTIQUE

THE wind shall lull us yet,
The flowers shall spring above us:
And those who hate forget,
And those forget who love us.

The pulse of hope shall cease,
Of joy and of regretting:
We twain shall sleep in peace,
Forgotten and forgetting.

For us no sun shall rise,
Nor wind rejoice, nor river,
Where we with fast-closed eyes
Shall sleep and sleep for ever.

10 *December* 1852.

TO WHAT PURPOSE IS THIS WASTE?

A WINDY shell singing upon the shore:
A lily budding in a desert place,
Blooming alone
With no companion
To praise its perfect perfume and its grace:
A rose crimson and blushing at the core,
Hedged-in with thorns behind it and before:
A fountain in the grass,
Whose shadowy waters pass
Only to nourish birds and furnish food
For squirrels of the wood:
An oak deep in the forest's heart, the house
Of black-eyed tiny mouse:
Its strong roots, fit for fuel, roofing in
The hoarded nuts, acorns, and grains of wheat—
Shutting them from the wind and scorching heat,
And sheltering them when the rains begin:

A precious pearl deep-buried in the sea
Where none save fishes be:
The fullest merriest note
For which the skylark strains his silver throat,
Heard only in the sky
By other birds that fitfully
Chase one another as they fly:
The ripest plum down-tumbled to the ground
By southern winds most musical of sound,
But by no thirsty traveller found:
Honey of wild bees in their ordered cells
Stored, not for human mouths to taste:—
I said smiling superior down: What waste
Of good, where no man dwells!

This I said on a pleasant day in June
Before the sun had set, though a white moon
Already flaked the quiet blue
Which not a star looked through.
But still the air was warm, and drowsily
It blew into my face:
So, since that same day I had wandered deep
Into the country, I sought out a place
For rest beneath a tree,
And very soon forgot myself in sleep:
Not so mine own words had forgotten me.
Mine eyes were open to behold
All hidden things,
And mine ears heard all secret whisperings:
So my proud tongue, that had been bold
To carp and to reprove,
Was silenced by the force of utter Love.

All voices of all things inanimate
Join with the song of Angels and the song
Of blessed spirits, chiming with
Their Hallelujahs. One wind wakeneth
Across the sleeping sea, crisping along

'Not this, not this!' and clasped
her hands
Against her heart, and bowed her
head,
While the great struggle shook the
bed.
'Not this, not this!' tears did not
fall;
'Not this!' it was all
She could say; no sobs would come;
The mortal grief was almost dumb.—
At length when it was over, when
She knew it was and would be so,
She cried: 'O Mother, where are
they,
The tears that used to flow
So easily? One single drop
Might save my reason now, or stop
My heart from breaking. Blessed
tears
Wasted in former years!'
Then the grave Mother made reply:
'O Daughter mine, be of good cheer,
Rejoicing thou canst shed no tear.
Thy pain is almost over now.
Once more thy heart shall throb
with pain,
But then shall never throb again.
Oh happy thou who canst not weep,
Oh happy thou!'

23 *March* 1850.

IS AND WAS

SHE was whiter than the ermine
That half shadowed neck and
hand,
And her tresses were more golden
Than their golden band;
Snowy ostrich plumes she wore;
Yet I almost loved her more
In the simple time before.

Then she plucked the stately lilies
Knowing not she was more fair,
And she listened to the skylark
In the morning air.
Then, a kerchief all her crown,
She looked for the acorns brown,
Bent their bough, and shook them
down.

Then she thought of Christmas holly
And of Maybloom in sweet May;
Then she loved to pick the cherries
And to turn the hay.
She was humble then and meek,
And the blush upon her cheek
Told of much she could not speak.

Now she is a noble lady
With calm voice not over loud;
Very courteous in her action,
Yet you think her proud;
Much too haughty to affect;
Too indifferent to direct
Or be angry or suspect;
Doing all from self-respect.

Spring 1850.

SONG

WE buried her among the flowers
At falling of the leaf,
And choked back all our tears; her
joy
Could never be our grief.

She lies among the living flowers
And grass, the only thing
That perishes;—or is it that
Our Autumn was her Spring?

Doubtless, if we could see her face
The smile is settled there
Which almost broke our hearts with
last
We knelt by her in prayer;

Then, with tired eyes and failing
breath
And hands crossed on her breast,
Perhaps she saw her Guardian spread
His wings above her rest.

So she sleeps hidden in the flowers;
But yet a little while,
And we shall see her wake and rise,
Fair, with the self-same smile.

14 *May* 1850.

ANNIE

ANNIE is fairer than her kith
And kinder than her kin:
Her eyes are like the open heaven
Holy and pure from sin:
Her heart is like an ordered house
Good fairies harbour in:
Oh happy he who wins the love
That I can never win!

Her sisters stand as hyacinths
Around the perfect rose:
They bloom and open to the full,
My bud will scarce unclose.
They are for every butterfly
That comes and sips and goes:
My bud hides in the tender green
Most sweet and hardly shows.

Oh cruel kindness in soft eyes
That are no more than kind,
On which I gaze my heart away
Till the tears make me blind!
How is it others find the way
That I can never find
To make her laugh that sweetest
laugh
Which leaves all else behind?

Her hair is like the golden corn
A low wind breathes upon:

Or like the golden harvest-moon
When all the mists are gone:
Or like a stream with golden sands
On which the sun has shone
Day after day in summertime
Ere autumn leaves are wan.

I will not tell her that I love,
Lest she should turn away
With sorrow in her tender heart
Which now is light and gay.
I will not tell her that I love,
Lest she should turn and say
That we must meet no more again
For many a weary day.

26 *September* 1850.

A DIRGE

SHE was as sweet as violets in the
Spring,
As fair as any rose in Summertime:
But frail are roses in their prime
And violets in their blossoming.
Even so was she:
And now she lies,
The earth upon her fast-closed
eyes,
Dead in the darkness silently.

The sweet Spring violets never bud
again,
The roses bloom and perish in a
morn:
They see no second quickening lying
lorn:
Their beauty dies as though in
vain.
Must she die so
For evermore,
Cold as the sand upon the shore,
As passionless for joy and woe?—

A hasty word is never the knife
To cut love in twain.

Far away stretched the royal land,
Fed by dew, by a spice-wind fanned.
Light labour more, and his foot would stand
On the threshold, all labour done;
Easy pleasure laid at his hand,
And the dear Bride won.

His slackening steps pause at the gate—
Does she wake or sleep?—the time is late—
Does she sleep now, or watch and wait?
She has watched, she has waited long,
Watching athwart the golden grate
With a patient song.

Fling the golden portals wide,
The Bridegroom comes to his promised Bride:
Draw the gold-stiff curtains aside,
Let them look on each other's face,
She in her meekness, he in his pride—
Day wears apace.

Day is over, the day that wore.
What is this that comes through the door,
The face covered, the feet before?
This that coming takes his breath;
This Bride not seen, to be seen no more
Save of Bridegroom Death?

Veiled figures carrying her
Sweep by yet make no stir;
There is a smell of spice and myrrh,
A bride-chant burdened with one name;
The bride-song rises steadier
Than the torches' flame:—

'Too late for love, too late for joy,
Too late, too late!
You loitered on the road too long,
You trifled at the gate:
The enchanted dove upon her branch
Died without a mate;
The enchanted princess in her tower
Slept, died, behind the grate;
Her heart was starving all this while
You made it wait.

'Ten years ago, five years ago,
One year ago,
Even then you had arrived in time,
Though somewhat slow;
Then you had known her living face
Which now you cannot know:
The frozen fountain would have leaped,
The buds gone on to blow,
The warm south wind would have awaked
To melt the snow.

'Is she fair now as she lies?
Once she was fair;
Meet queen for any kingly king,
With gold-dust on her hair.
Now these are poppies in her locks,
White poppies she must wear;
Must wear a veil to shroud her face
And the want graven there:
Or is the hunger fed at length,
Cast off the care?

'We never saw her with a smile
Or with a frown;
Her bed seemed never soft to her,
Though tossed of down;

She little heeded what she wore,
Kirtle, or wreath, or gown;
We think her white brows often ached
Beneath her crown,
Till silvery hairs showed in her locks
That used to be so brown.

'We never heard her speak in haste;
Her tones were sweet,
And modulated just so much
As it was meet:
Her heart sat silent through the noise
And concourse of the street.
There was no hurry in her hands,
No hurry in her feet;
There was no bliss drew nigh to her,
That she might run to greet.

'You should have wept her yesterday,
Wasting upon her bed:
But wherefore should you weep to-day
That she is dead?
Lo we who love weep not to-day,
But crown her royal head.
Let be these poppies that we strew,
Your roses are too red:
Let be these poppies, not for you
Cut down and spread.'

11 *October* 1861 to *March* 1865.

A ROYAL PRINCESS

I a Princess king-descended, deckt
With jewels, gilded, drest,
Would rather be a peasant with her baby at her breast,
For all I shine so like the sun, and am purple like the west.

Two and two my guards behind, two and two before,
Two and two on either hand, they guard me evermore;
Me, poor dove that must not coo—eagle that must not soar.

All my fountains cast up perfumes, all my gardens grow
Scented woods and foreign spices, with all flowers in blow
That are costly, out of season as the seasons go.

All my walls are lost in mirrors, whereupon I trace
Self to right hand, self to left hand, self in every place,
Self-same solitary figure, self-same seeking face.

Then I have an ivory chair high to sit upon,
Almost like my father's chair which is an ivory throne;
There I sit uplift and upright, there I sit alone.

Alone by day, alone by night, alone days without end;
My father and my mother give me treasures, search and spend—
O my father! O my mother! have you ne'er a friend?

As I am a lofty princess, so my father is
A lofty king, accomplished in all kingly subtilties,
Holding in his strong right hand world-kingdoms' balances.

He has quarrelled with his neighbours, he has scourged his foes;
Vassal counts and princes follow where his pennon goes,
Long-descended valiant lords whom the vulture knows,

On whose track the vulture swoops,
when they ride in state
To break the strength of armies and
topple down the great:
Each of these my courteous servant,
none of these my mate.

My father counting up his strength
sets down with equal pen
So many head of cattle, head of
horses, head of men;
These for slaughter, these for labour,
with the how and when.

Some to work on roads, canals; some
to man his ships;
Some to smart in mines beneath
sharp overseers' whips;
Some to trap fur-beasts in lands
where utmost winter nips.

Once it came into my heart, and
whelmed me like a flood,
That these too are men and women,
human flesh and blood;
Men with hearts and men with souls,
though trodden down like mud.

Our feasting was not glad that night,
our music was not gay:
On my mother's graceful head I
marked a thread of grey,
My father frowning at the fare
seemed every dish to weigh.

I sat beside them sole princess in my
exalted place,
My ladies and my gentlemen stood
by me on the dais:
A mirror showed me I look old and
haggard in the face;

It showed me that my ladies all are
fair to gaze upon,
Plump, plenteous-haired, to every
one love's secret lore is known,
They laugh by day, they sleep by
night; ah me, what is a throne?

The singing men and women sang
that night as usual,
The dancers danced in pairs and sets,
but music had a fall,
A melancholy windy fall as at a
funeral.

Amid the toss of torches to my
chamber back we swept;
My ladies loosed my golden chain;
meantime I could have wept
To think of some in galling chains
whether they waked or slept.

I took my bath of scented milk,
delicately waited on:
They burned sweet things for my
delight, cedar and cinnamon,
They lit my shaded silver lamp, and
left me there alone.

A day went by, a week went by. One
day I heard it said:
'Men are clamouring, women,
children, clamouring to be fed;
Men like famished dogs are howling
in the streets for bread.'

So two whispered by my door, not
thinking I could hear,
Vulgar naked truth, ungarnished for
a royal ear;
Fit for cooping in the background,
not to stalk so near.

But I strained my utmost sense to
catch this truth, and mark:
'There are families out grazing, like
cattle in the park.'

'A pair of peasants must be saved,
even if we build an ark.'

A merry jest, a merry laugh: each
strolled upon his way;
One was my page, a lad I reared and
bore with day by day;
One was my youngest maid, as sweet
and white as cream in May.

Other footsteps followed softly with
a weightier tramp;
Voices said: 'Picked soldiers have
been summoned from the camp,
To quell these base-born ruffians who
make free to howl and stamp.'

'Howl and stamp?' one answered:
'They made free to hurl a stone
At the minister's state coach, well
aimed and stoutly thrown.'
'There's work then for the soldiers, for
this rank crop must be mown.'

'One I saw, a poor old fool with
ashes on his head,
Whimpering because a girl had
snatched his crust of bread:
Then he dropped; when some one
raised him, it turned out he was
dead.'

'After us the deluge,' was retorted
with a laugh:
'If bread's the staff of life they must
walk without a staff.'
'While I've a loaf they're welcome
to my blessing and the chaff.'

These passed. 'The king': stand
up. Said my father with a
smile:
'Daughter mine, your mother comes
to sit with you awhile;
She's sad to-day, and who but you
her sadness can beguile?'

He too left me. Shall I touch my
harp now while I wait,—
(I hear them doubling guard below
before our palace gate)—
Or shall I work the last gold stitch
into my veil of state;

Or shall my woman stand and read
some unimpassioned scene,—
There's music of a lulling sort in
words that pause between;
Or shall she merely fan me while I
wait here for the queen?

Again I caught my father's voice in
sharp word of command:
'Charge' a clash of steel: 'Charge
again, the rebels stand.
Smite and spare not, hand to hand;
smite and spare not, hand to
hand.'

There swelled a tumult at the gate,
high voices waxing higher;
A flash of red reflected light lit the
cathedral spire;
I heard a cry for faggots, then I
heard a yell for fire.

'Sit and roast there with your meat,
sit and bake there with your
bread,
You who sat to see us starve,' one
shrieking woman said:
'Sit on your throne and roast with
your crown upon your head.'

Nay, this thing will I do, while my
mother tarrieth,
I will take my fine spun gold, but
not to sew therewith,

I will take my gold and gems, and
rainbow fan and wreath;

With a ransom in my lap, a king's
ransom in my hand,
I will go down to this people, will
stand face to face, will stand
Where they curse king, queen, and
princess of this cursed land.

They shall take all to buy them
bread, take all I have to give;
I, if I perish, perish; they to-day
shall eat and live;
I, if I perish, perish—that's the
goal I half conceive:

Once to speak before the world, rend
bare my heart, and show
The lesson I have learned, which is
death, is life, to know.
I, if I perish, perish: in the name
of God I go.

22 *October* 1861.

MAIDEN-SONG

LONG ago and long ago
And long ago still,
There dwelt three merry maidens
Upon a distant hill.
One was tall Meggan,
And one was dainty May,
But one was fair Margaret,
More fair than I can say,
Long ago and long ago.

When Meggan pluckt the thorny
rose,
And when May pulled the brier,
Half the birds would swoop to see,
Half the beasts drew nigher,
Half the fishes of the streams
Would dart up to admire.
But, when Margaret pluckt a flag-
flower
Or poppy hot aflame,
All the beasts and all the birds
And all the fishes came
To her hand more soft than snow.

Strawberry leaves and May-dew
In brisk morning air,
Strawberry leaves and May-dew
Make maidens fair.
'I go for strawberry leaves,'
Meggan said one day:
'Fair Margaret can bide at home,
But you come with me, May:
Up the hill and down the hill,
Along the winding way
You and I are used to go.'

So these two fair sisters
Went with innocent will
Up the hill and down again,
And round the homestead hill:
While the fairest sat at home,
Margaret like a queen,
Like a blush-rose, like the moon
In her heavenly sheen,
Fragrant-breathed as milky cow
Or field of blossoming bean,
Graceful as an ivy bough
Born to cling and lean;
Thus she sat to sing and sew.

When she raised her lustrous eyes
A beast peeped at the door;
When she downward cast her eyes
A fish gasped on the floor;
When she turned away her eyes
A bird perched on the sill,
Warbling out its heart of love,
Warbling warbling still,
With pathetic pleadings low.

Light-foot May with Meggan
Sought the choicest spot,
Clothed with thyme-alternate grass:
Then, while day waxed hot,
Sat at ease to play and rest,
A gracious rest and play;
The loveliest maidens near or far,
When Margaret was away,
Who sat at home to sing and sew.

Sun-glow flushed their comely cheeks,
Wind-play tossed their hair,
Creeping things among the grass
Stroked them here and there;
Meggan piped a merry note,
A fitful wayward lay
While shrill as bird on topmost
twig
Piped merry May;
Honey-smooth the double flow.

Sped a herdsman from the vale,
Mounting like a flame;
All on fire to hear and see,
With floating locks he came.
Looked neither north nor south,
Neither east nor west,
But sat him down at Meggan's feet
As love-bird on his nest,
And wooed her with a silent awe,
With trouble not expressed;
She sang the tears into his eyes,
The heart out of his breast:
So he loved her, listening so.

She sang the heart out of his
breast,
The words out of his tongue;
Hand and foot and pulse he paused
Till her song was sung.
Then he spoke up from his place
Simple words and true:
'Scanty goods have I to give,
Scanty skill to woo;
But I have a will to work,
And a heart for you:
Bid me stay or bid me go.'

Then Meggan mused within herself:
'Better be first with him
Than dwell where fairer Margaret
sits,
Who shines my brightness dim,
For ever second where she sits,
However fair I be:
I will be lady of his love,
And he shall worship me;
I will be lady of his herds
And stoop to his degree,
At home where kids and fatlings
grow.'

Sped a shepherd from the height
Headlong down to look,
(White lambs followed, lured by love
Of their shepherd's crook):
He turned neither east nor west,
Neither north nor south,
But knelt right down to May, for love
Of her sweet-singing mouth;
Forgot his flocks, his panting flocks
In parching hill-side drouth;
Forgot himself for weal or woe.

Trilled her song and swelled her
song
With maiden coy caprice
In a labyrinth of throbs,
Pauses, cadences;
Clear-noted as a dropping brook,
Soft-noted like the bees,
Wild-noted as the shivering wind
Forlorn through forest-trees:
Love-noted like the wood-pigeon
Who hides herself for love,
Yet cannot keep her secret safe,
But coos and coos thereof:
Thus the notes rang loud or low.

DREAM-LOVE

YOUNG Love lies sleeping
In May-time of the year,
Among the lilies,
Lapped in the tender light:
White lambs come grazing,
White doves come building there;
And round about him
The May-bushes are white.

Soft moss the pillow
For oh a softer cheek;
Broad leaves cast shadow
Upon the heavy eyes:
There winds and waters
Grow lulled and scarcely speak;
There twilight lingers
The longest in the skies.

Young Love lies dreaming;
But who shall tell the dream?
A perfect sunlight
On rustling forest tips;
Or perfect moonlight
Upon a rippling stream;
Or perfect silence,
Or song of cherished lips.

Burn odours round him
To fill the drowsy air;
Weave silent dances
Around him to and fro;
For oh in waking
The sights are not so fair,
And song and silence
Are not like these below.

Young Love lies dreaming
Till summer days are gone,—
Dreaming and drowsing
Away to perfect sleep:
He sees the beauty
Sun hath not looked upon,
And tastes the fountain
Unutterably deep.

Him perfect music
Doth hush unto his rest,
And through the pauses
The perfect silence calms:
Oh poor the voices
Of earth from east to west,
And poor earth's stillness
Between her stately palms!

Young Love lies drowsing
Away to poppied death;
Cool shadows deepen
Across the sleeping face:
So fails the summer
With warm delicious breath;
And what hath autumn
To give us in its place?

Draw close the curtains
Of branchèd evergreen;
Change cannot touch them
With fading fingers here:
Here the first violets
Perhaps will bud unseen,
And a dove, may be,
Return to nestle here.

19 *May* 1854.

FROM THE ANTIQUE

IT'S a weary life, it is, she said:—
Doubly blank in a woman's lot:
I wish and I wish I were a man:
Or, better than any being, were not:

Were nothing at all in all the world
Not a body and not a soul:
Not so much as a grain of dust
Or drop of water from pole to pole.

If the world would wag on the same,
Still the seasons go and come:
Blossoms bloom as in days of old,
Cherries ripen and wild bees hum.

None would miss me in all the world,
How much less would care or weep:
It should be nothing, while all the rest
Would wake and weary and fall asleep.

18 *June* 1854.

LONG LOOKED FOR

WHEN the eye hardly sees,
And the pulse hardly stirs,
And the heart would scarcely quicken
Though the voice were hers:
Then the longing wasting fever
Will be almost past:
Sleep indeed come back again,
And peace at last.

Not till then, dear friends,
Not till then, most like, most dear,
The dove will fold its wings
To settle here.
Then to all her coldness
I also shall be cold;
Then I also have forgotten
Our happy love of old.

Close mine eyes with care,
Cross my hands upon my breast,
Let shadows and full silence
Tell of rest:
For she yet may look upon me,
Too proud to speak, but know
One heart less loves her in the world
Than loved her long ago.

Strew flowers upon the bed
And flowers upon the floor,
Let all be sweet and comely
When she stands at the door:
Fair as a bridal chamber
For her to come into,
When the sunny day is over
At falling of the dew.

If she comes, watch her not,
But careless turn aside:
She may weep if left alone
With her beauty and her pride:
She may pluck a leaf perhaps
Or a languid violet
When life and love are finished
And even I forget.

12 *August* 1854.

LISTENING

SHE listened like a cushat dove
That listens to its mate alone:
She listened like a cushat dove
That loves but only one.

Not fair as men would reckon fair,
Nor noble as they count the line:
Only as graceful as a bough,
And tendrils of the vine:
Only as noble as sweet Eve
Your ancestress and mine.

And downcast were her dovelike eyes
And downcast was her tender cheek;
Her pulses fluttered like a dove
To hear him speak.

October 1854.

DEAD BEFORE DEATH

AH changed and cold, how changed and very cold,
With stiffened smiling lips and cold calm eyes!

Changed, yet the same; much knowing, little wise,—
This was the promise of the days of old!
Grown hard and stubborn in the ancient mould,
Grown rigid in the sham of life-long lies:
We hoped for better things as years would rise,
But it is over as a tale once told.
All fallen the blossom that no fruitage bore,
All lost the present and the future time,
All lost, all lost, the lapse that went before:
So lost under death shut-to the opened door,
So lost from chime to everlasting chime,
So cold and lost for ever evermore.

2 *December* 1854.

ECHO

COME to me in the silence of the night;
Come in the speaking silence of a dream;
Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright
As sunlight on a stream;
Come back in tears,
O memory, hope, love of finished years.

O dream how sweet, too sweet, too bitter sweet,
Whose wakening should have been in Paradise,
Where souls brimfull of love abide and meet;
Where thirsting longing eyes
Watch the slow door
That opening, letting in, lets out no more.

Yet come to me in dreams, that I may live
My very life again though cold in death:
Come back to me in dreams, that I may give
Pulse for pulse, breath for breath:
Speak low, lean low,
As long ago, my love, how long ago.

18 *December* 1854.

THE FIRST SPRING DAY

I WONDER if the sap is stirring yet,
If wintry birds are dreaming of a mate,
If frozen snowdrops feel as yet the sun
And crocus fires are kindling one by one:
Sing, robin, sing;
I still am sore in doubt concerning Spring.

I wonder if the Springtide of this year
Will bring another Spring both hot and dear;
If heart and spirit will find out their Spring,
Or if the world alone will bud and sing:
Sing, hope, to me;
Sweet notes, my hope, soft notes for memory.

The sap will surely quicken soon or late,
The tardiest bird will twitter to a mate;

So Spring must dawn again with warmth and bloom,
Or in this world or in the world to come:
Sing, voice of Spring,
Till I too blossom and rejoice and sing.

1 *March* 1855.

MY DREAM

HEAR now a curious dream I dreamed last night,
Each word whereof is weighed and sifted truth.

I stood beside Euphrates while it swelled
Like overflowing Jordan in its youth.
It waxed and coloured sensibly to sight;
Till out of myriad pregnant waves there welled
Young crocodiles, a gaunt blunt-featured crew,
Fresh-hatched perhaps and daubed with birthday dew.
The rest if I should tell, I fear my friend,
My closest friend, would deem the facts untrue;
And therefore it were wisely left untold;
Yet if you will, why, hear it to the end.

Each crocodile was girt with massive gold
And polished stones that with their wearers grew:
But one there was who waxed beyond the rest,
Wore kinglier girdle and a kingly crown,
Whilst crowns and orbs and sceptres starred his breast.
All gleamed compact and green with scale on scale,
But special burnishment adorned his mail
And special terror weighed upon his frown;
His punier brethren quaked before his tail,
Broad as a rafter, potent as a flail.
So he grew lord and master of his kin:
But who shall tell the tale of all their woes?
An execrable appetite arose,
He battened on them, crunched, and sucked them in.
He knew no law, he feared no binding law,
But ground them with inexorable jaw.
The luscious fat distilled upon his chin,
Exuded from his nostrils and his eyes,
While still like hungry death he fed his maw;
Till, every minor crocodile being dead
And buried too, himself gorged to the full,
He slept with breath oppressed and unstrung claw.

Oh marvel passing strange which next I saw!
In sleep he dwindled to the common size,
And all the empire faded from his coat.
Then from far off a wingèd vessel came,
Swift as a swallow, subtle as a flame:

'And if I answer yea, fair Sir,
What man art thou to bar with nay?'

He was a strong man from the north,
Light-locked, with eyes of dangerous grey:
'Put yea by for another time
In which I will not say thee nay.'

He took me in his strong white arms,
He bore me on his horse away
O'er crag, morass, and hairbreadth pass,
But never asked me yea or nay.

He made me fast with book and bell,
With links of love he makes me stay;
Till now I've neither heart nor power
Nor will nor wish to say him nay.

19 *December* 1856.

IN AN ARTIST'S STUDIO

ONE face looks out from all his canvases,
One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans:
We found her hidden just behind those screens,
That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
A queen in opal or in ruby dress,
A nameless girl in freshest summer-g[illegible],
A saint, an [illegible]—every canvas means
The same one meaning, neither more nor less.
He feeds upon her face by day and night,
And she with true kind eyes looks back on him,
Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:
Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;
Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;
Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.

24 *December* 1856.

FATA MORGANA

A BLUE-EYED phantom far before
Is laughing, leaping toward the sun:
Like lead I chase it evermore,
I pant and run.

It breaks the sunlight bound on bound:
Goes singing as it leaps along
To sheep-bells with a dreamy sound
A dreamy song.

I laugh, it is so brisk and gay;
It is so far before, I weep:
I hope I shall lie down some day,
Lie down and sleep.

18 *April* 1857.

ONE DAY

I WILL tell you when they met:
In the limpid days of Spring;
Elder boughs were budding yet,
Oaken boughs looked wintry still,
But primrose and veined violet
In the mossful turf were set,
While meeting birds made haste to sing
And build with right good will.

I will tell you when they parted;
When plenteous Autumn sheaves were brown
Then they parted heavy-hearted;
The full rejoicing sun looked down
As grand as in the days before;
Only they had lost a crown;
Only to them those days of yore
Could come back nevermore.

When shall they meet? I cannot tell,
Indeed, when they shall meet again,
Except some day in Paradise:
For this they wait, one waits in pain.
Beyond the sea of death Love lies
For ever, yesterday, to-day;
Angels shall ask them, 'Is it well?'
And they shall answer 'Yea.'

9 *June* 1857.

INTROSPECTIVE

I WISH it were over the terrible pain,
Pang after pang again and again:
First the shattering ruining blow,
Then the probing steady and slow.

Did I wince? I did not faint:
My soul broke but was not bent:
Up I stand like a blasted tree
By the shore of the shivering sea.

On my boughs neither leaf nor fruit,
No sap in my uttermost root,
Brooding in an anguish dumb
On the short past and the long to-come.

Dumb I was when the ruin fell,
Dumb I remain and will never tell;
O my soul, I talk with thee,
But not another the sight must see.

I did not start when the torture stung,
I did not faint when the torture wrung:
Let it come tenfold if come it must,
But I will not groan when I bite the dust.

30 *June* 1857.

A PEAL OF BELLS

STRIKE the bells wantonly,
Tinkle tinkle well;
Bring me wine, bring me flowers,
Ring the silver bell.
All my lamps burn scented oil,
Hung on laden orange-trees,
Whose shadowed foliage is the foil
To golden lamps and oranges.
Heap my golden plates with fruit,
Golden fruit, fresh-plucked and ripe;
Strike the bells and breathe the pipe;
Shut out showers from summer hours—
Silence that complaining lute—
Shut out thinking, shut out pain,
From hours that cannot come again.

Strike the bells solemnly,
Ding dong deep:
My friend is passing to his bed,
Fast asleep;
There's plaited linen round his head,
While foremost go his feet—
His feet that cannot carry him.
My feast's a show, my lights are dim;
Be still, your music is not sweet,—
There is no music more for him.
His lights are out, his feast is done:

To warm thy paleness to a blush
When I am far away,—
To warm thy coldness to a flush
And turn thee back to May,
And turn thy twilight back to day.'

She did not answer him a word,
But leaned her face aside,
Sick with the pain of hope deferred
And sore with wounded pride:
He knew his very soul had lied.
She strained his baby in her arms,
His baby to her heart:
'Even let it go, the love that harms;
We two will never part:
Mine own, his own, how dear thou art!'

'Now never tease me, tender-eyed,
Sigh-voiced,' he said in scorn:
'For nigh at hand there blooms a bride,
My bride before the morn:
Ripe-blooming she, as thou forlorn.
Ripe-blooming she, my rose, my peach:
She wooes me day and night:
I watch her tremble in my reach:
She reddens, my delight,
She ripens, reddens, in my sight.'

'And is she like a sunlit rose?
Am I like withered leaves?
Haste where thy spicèd garden blows:
But in bare autumn eves
Wilt thou have store of harvest-sheaves?
Thou leavest love, true love behind,
To seek a love as true:
Go seek in haste,—but wilt thou find?
Change new again for new,
Pluck up, enjoy, yea trample too.

'Alas for her, poor faded rose,
Alas for her like me,
Cast down and trampled in the snows.'—
'Like thee? nay not like thee:
She leans, but from a guarded tree.
Farewell, and dream as long ago
Before we ever met:
Farewell: my swift-paced horse seems slow.'—
She raised her eyes, not wet
But hard, to Heaven: 'Dost Thou forget?'

28 *October* 1856.

DOWNCAST

THESE roses are as perfect as of old,
Those lilies wear their selfsame sunny white;
I, only I, am changed and sad and cold.
The morning star still glorifies the night,
And musical that fountain in its swell
Casts as of old its waters to the light.
Oh that I were a rose, so I might dwell
Contented in a garden on my thorn,
Fulfilling mine appointed fragrance well;
Or stainless lily in the summer morn—
Though no man pluck it, yet the honey-bee
Knows it for sweetness in its bosom born.
Or that I were a star, from sea to sea

Guiding the seekers to their port of rest,
Guiding them till night's shuffling shadows flee;
Or that I were a spring to which, opprest
With desert drought, some wearied wayfarer
Comes from the barren regions of the West.
Then should I stand at peace, and should not err,
Or lighten and make beautiful the sky,
Or make more glad than frankincense and myrrh.
But now it is not so: I, only I,
Am changed and sad and cold, while in my soul
The very fountain of delight is dry.

12 *December* 1856.

A TRIAD

THREE sang of love together: one with lips
Crimson, with cheeks and bosom in a glow,
Flushed to the yellow hair and finger-tips;
And one there sang who soft and smooth as snow
Bloomed like a tinted hyacinth at a show;
And one was blue with famine after love,
Who like a harpstring snapped rang harsh and low
The burden of what those were singing of.
One shamed herself in love; one temperately
Grew gross in soulless love, a sluggish wife;
One famished died for love. Thus two of three
Took death for love and won him after strife;
One droned in sweetness like a fattened bee:
All on the threshold, yet all short of life.

18 *December* 1856.

LOVE FROM THE NORTH

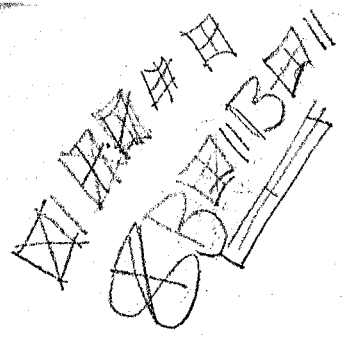
I HAD a love in soft south land,
Beloved through April far in May;
He waited on my lightest breath,
And never dared to say me nay.

He saddened if my cheer was sad,
But gay he grew if I was gay;
We never differed on a hair,
My yes his yes, my nay his nay.

The wedding hour was come, the aisles
Were flushed with sun and flowers that day;
I pacing balanced in my thoughts:
'It's quite too late to think of nay.'—

My bridegroom answered in his turn,
Myself had almost answered 'yea:'
When through the flashing nave I heard
A struggle and resounding 'nay.'

Bridemaids and bridegroom shrank in fear,
But I stood high who stood at bay:



THE LONGER POEMS

GOBLIN MARKET

MORNING and evening
Maids heard the goblins cry:
'Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy:
Apples and quinces,
Lemons and oranges,
Plump unpecked cherries,
Melons and raspberries,
Bloom-down-cheeked peaches,
Swart-headed mulberries,
Wild free-born cranberries,
Crab-apples, dewberries,
Pine-apples, blackberries,
Apricots, strawberries;—
All ripe together
In summer weather,—
Morns that pass by,
Fair eves that fly;
Come buy, come buy:
Our grapes fresh from the vine,
Pomegranates full and fine,
Dates and sharp bullaces,
Rare pears and greengages,
Damsons and bilberries,
Taste them and try:
Currants and gooseberries,
Bright-fire-like barberries,
Figs to fill your mouth,
Citrons from the South,
Sweet to tongue and sound to eye;
Come buy, come buy.'

Evening by evening
Among the brookside rushes,
Laura bowed her head to hear,
Lizzie veiled her blushes:
Crouching close together
In the cooling weather,
With clasping arms and cautioning lips,
With tingling cheeks and finger tips.
'Lie close,' Laura said,
Pricking up her golden head:
'We must not look at goblin men,
We must not buy their fruits:
Who knows upon what soil they fed
Their hungry thirsty roots?'
'Come buy,' call the goblins
Hobbling down the glen.
'Oh,' cried Lizzie, 'Laura, Laura,
You should not peep at goblin men.'
Lizzie covered up her eyes,
Covered close lest they should look;
Laura reared her glossy head,
And whispered like the restless brook:
'Look, Lizzie, look, Lizzie,
Down the glen tramp little men.
One hauls a basket,
One bears a plate,
One lugs a golden dish
Of many pounds' weight.
How fair the vine must grow
Whose grapes are so luscious;
How warm the wind must blow
Through those fruit bushes.'

'No,' said Lizzie: 'No, no, no;
Their offers should not charm us,
Their evil gifts would harm us.'
She thrust a dimpled finger
In each ear, shut eyes and ran:
Curious Laura chose to linger
Wondering at each merchant man.
One had a cat's face,
One whisked a tail,
One tramped at a rat's pace,
One crawled like a snail,
One like a wombat prowled obtuse and furry,
One like a ratel tumbled hurry skurry.
She heard a voice like voice of doves
Cooing all together:
They sounded kind and full of loves
In the pleasant weather.

Laura stretched her gleaming neck
Like a rush-imbedded swan,
Like a lily from the beck,
Like a moonlit poplar branch,
Like a vessel at the launch
When its last restraint is gone.

Backwards up the mossy glen
Turned and trooped the goblin men,
With their shrill repeated cry,
'Come buy, come buy.'
When they reached where Laura was
They stood stock still upon the moss,
Leering at each other,
Brother with queer brother;
Signalling each other,
Brother with sly brother.
One set his basket down,
One reared his plate;
One began to weave a crown
Of tendrils, leaves, and rough nuts brown
(Men sell not such in any town);
One heaved the golden weight
Of dish and fruit to offer her:
'Come buy, come buy,' was still their cry.
Laura stared but did not stir,
Longed but had no money.
The whisk-tailed merchant bade her taste
In tones as smooth as honey,
The cat-faced purr'd,
The rat-paced spoke a word
Of welcome, and the snail-paced even was heard;
One parrot-voiced and jolly
Cried 'Pretty Goblin' still for 'Pretty Polly';
One whistled like a bird.

But sweet-tooth Laura spoke in haste:
'Good Folk, I have no coin;
To take were to purloin:
I have no copper in my purse,
I have no silver either,
And all my gold is on the furze
That shakes in windy weather
Above the rusty heather.'
'You have much gold upon your head,'
They answered all together:
'Buy from us with a golden curl.'
She clipped a precious golden lock,
She dropped a tear more rare than pearl,
Then sucked their fruit globes fair or red.
Sweeter than honey from the rock,
Stronger than man-rejoicing wine,
Clearer than water flowed that juice;
She never tasted such before,
How should it cloy with length of use?
She sucked and sucked and sucked the more
Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;

She sucked until her lips were sore;
Then flung the emptied rinds away
But gathered up one kernel stone,
And knew not was it night or day
As she turned home alone.

Lizzie met her at the gate
Full of wise upbraidings:
'Dear, you should not stay so late,
Twilight is not good for maidens;
Should not loiter in the glen
In the haunts of goblin men.
Do you not remember Jeanie,
How she met them in the moonlight,
Took their gifts both choice and many,
Ate their fruits and wore their flowers
Plucked from bowers
Where summer ripens at all hours?
But ever in the noonlight
She pined and pined away;
Sought them by night and day,
Found them no more, but dwindled and grew grey;
Then fell with the first snow,
While to this day no grass will grow
Where she lies low:
I planted daisies there a year ago
That never blow.
You should not loiter so.'
'Nay, hush,' said Laura:
'Nay, hush, my sister:
I ate and ate my fill,
Yet my mouth waters still:
To-morrow night I will
Buy more;' and kissed her.
'Have done with sorrow;
I'll bring you plums to-morrow
Fresh on their mother twigs,
Cherries worth getting;
You cannot think what figs
My teeth have met in,
What melons icy-cold
Piled on a dish of gold
Too huge for me to hold,
What peaches with a velvet nap,
Pellucid grapes without one seed:
Odorous indeed must be the mead
Whereon they grow, and pure the wave they drink
With lilies at the brink,
And sugar-sweet their sap.'

Golden head by golden head,
Like two pigeons in one nest
Folded in each other's wings,
They lay down in their curtained bed:
Like two blossoms on one stem,
Like two flakes of new-fall'n snow,
Like two wands of ivory
Tipped with gold for awful kings.
Moon and stars gazed in at them,
Wind sang to them lullaby,
Lumbering owls forebore to fly,
Not a bat flapped to and fro
Round their nest:
Cheek to cheek and breast to breast
Locked together in one nest.

Early in the morning
When the first cock crowed his warning,
Neat like bees, as sweet and busy,
Laura rose with Lizzie:
Fetched in honey, milked the cows,
Aired and set to rights the house,
Kneaded cakes of whitest wheat,
Cakes for dainty mouths to eat,
Next churned butter, whipped up cream,
Fed their poultry, sat and sewed;
Talked as modest maidens should:
Lizzie with an open heart,
Laura in an absent dream,
One content, one sick in part;

One warbling for the mere bright
day's delight,
One longing for the night.

At length slow evening came:
They went with pitchers to the
reedy brook;
Lizzie most placid in her look,
Laura most like a leaping flame.
They drew the gurgling water from
its deep.
Lizzie plucked purple and rich
golden flags,
Then turning homeward said: 'The
sunset flushes
Those furthest loftiest crags;
Come, Laura, not another maiden
lags.
No wilful squirrel wags,
The beasts and birds are fast asleep.'
But Laura loitered still among the
rushes,
And said the bank was steep.

And said the hour was early still,
The dew not fall'n, the wind not
chill;
Listening ever, but not catching
The customary cry,
'Come buy, come buy,'
With its iterated jingle
Of sugar-baited words:
Not for all her watching
Once discerning even one goblin
Racing, whisking, tumbling, hob-
bling—
Let alone the herds
That used to tramp along the glen,
In groups or single,
Of brisk fruit-merchant men.

Till Lizzie urged, 'O Laura, come;
I hear the fruit-call, but I dare not
look:
You should not loiter longer at this
brook:
Come with me home.
The stars rise, the moon bends her
arc,
Each glow-worm winks her spark,
Let us get home before the night
grows dark:
For clouds may gather
Though this is summer weather,
Put out the lights and drench us
through;
Then if we lost our way what should
we do?'

Laura turned cold as stone
To find her sister heard that cry
alone,
That goblin cry,
'Come buy our fruits, come buy.'
Must she then buy no more such
dainty fruit?
Must she no more such succous
pasture find,
Gone deaf and blind?
Her tree of life drooped from the
root:
She said not one word in her heart's
sore ache:
But peering thro' the dimness,
nought discerning,
Trudged home, her pitcher dripping
all the way;
So crept to bed, and lay
Silent till Lizzie slept;
Then sat up in a passionate yearning,
And gnashed her teeth for baulked
desire, and wept
As if her heart would break.

Day after day, night after night,
Laura kept watch in vain
In sullen silence of exceeding pain.

She never caught again the goblin
cry,
'Come buy, come buy;'—
She never spied the goblin men
Hawking their fruits along the glen:
But when the noon waxed bright
Her hair grew thin and grey;
She dwindled, as the fair full moon
doth turn
To swift decay and burn
Her fire away.

One day remembering her kernel-
stone
She set it by a wall that faced the
south;
Dewed it with tears, hoped for a
root,
Watched for a waxing shoot,
But there came none.
It never saw the sun,
It never felt the trickling moisture
run:
While with sunk eyes and faded
mouth
She dreamed of melons, as a
traveller sees
False waves in desert drouth
With shade of leaf-crowned trees,
And burns the thirstier in the sand-
ful breeze.

She no more swept the house,
Tended the fowls or cows,
Fetched honey, kneaded cakes of
wheat,
Brought water from the brook:
But sat down listless in the chimney-
nook
And would not eat.

Tender Lizzie could not bear
To watch her sister's cankerous care,
Yet not to share.
She night and morning
Caught the goblins' cry:
'Come buy our orchard fruits,
Come buy, come buy:'—
Beside the brook, along the glen,
She heard the tramp of goblin men,
The voice and stir
Poor Laura could not hear;
Longed to buy fruit to comfort her,
But feared to pay too dear.
She thought of Jeanie in her grave,
Who should have been a bride;
But who for joys brides hope to have
Fell sick and died
In her gay prime,
In earliest winter time,
With the first glazing rime,
With the first snow-fall of crisp
winter time.

Till Laura dwindling
Seemed knocking at Death's door.
Then Lizzie weighed no more
Better and worse;
But put a silver penny in her purse,
Kissed Laura, crossed the heath
with clumps of furze
At twilight, halted by the brook:
And for the first time in her life
Began to listen and look.

Laughed every goblin
When they spied her peeping:
Came towards her hobbling,
Flying, running, leaping,
Puffing and blowing,
Chuckling, clapping, crowing,
Clucking and gobbling,
Mopping and mowing,
Full of airs and graces,
Pulling wry faces,
Demure grimaces,
Cat-like and rat-like,
Ratel- and wombat-like,

Snail-paced in a hurry,
Parrot-voiced and whistler,
Helter skelter, hurry skurry,
Chattering like magpies,
Fluttering like pigeons,
Gliding like fishes,—
Hugged her and kissed her:
Squeezed and caressed her:
Stretched up their dishes,
Panniers, and plates:
'Look at our apples
Russet and dun,
Bob at our cherries,
Bite at our peaches,
Citrons and dates,
Grapes for the asking,
Pears red with basking
Out in the sun,
Plums on their twigs;
Pluck them and suck them,—
Pomegranates, figs.'

'Good folk,' said Lizzie,
Mindful of Jeanie:
'Give me much and many:'
Held out her apron,
Tossed them her penny.
'Nay, take a seat with us,
Honour and eat with us,'
They answered grinning:
'Our feast is but beginning.
Night yet is early,
Warm and dew-pearly,
Wakeful and starry:
Such fruits as these
No man can carry;
Half their bloom would fly,
Half their dew would dry,
Half their flavour would pass by.
Sit down and feast with us,
Be welcome guest with us,
Cheer you and rest with us.'—
'Thank you,' said Lizzie: 'But one
waits
At home alone for me:
So without further parleying,
If you will not sell me any
Of your fruits though much and many,
Give me back my silver penny
I tossed you for a fee.'—
They began to scratch their pates,
No longer wagging, purring,
But visibly demurring,
Grunting and snarling.
One called her proud,
Cross-grained, uncivil;
Their tones waxed loud,
Their looks were evil.
Lashing their tails
They trod and hustled her,
Elbowed and jostled her,
Clawed with their nails,
Barking, mewing, hissing, mocking,
Tore her gown and soiled her
stocking,
Twitched her hair out by the roots,
Stamped upon her tender feet,
Held her hands and squeezed their
fruits
Against her mouth to make her eat.

White and golden Lizzie stood,
Like a lily in a flood,—
Like a rock of blue-veined stone
Lashed by tides obstreperously,—
Like a beacon left alone
In a hoary roaring sea,
Sending up a golden fire,—
Like a fruit-crowned orange-tree
White with blossoms honey-sweet
Sore beset by wasp and bee,—
Like a royal virgin town
Topped with gilded dome and spire
Close beleaguered by a fleet
Mad to tug her standard down.

One may lead a horse to water,
Twenty cannot make him drink.

Though the goblins cuffed and caught
her,
Coaxed and fought her,
Bullied and besought her,
Scratched her, pinched her black as
ink,
Kicked and knocked her,
Mauled and mocked her,
Lizzie uttered not a word;
Would not open lip from lip
Lest they should cram a mouthful in:
But laughed in heart to feel the drip
Of juice that syruped all her face,
And lodged in dimples of her chin,
And streaked her neck which quaked
like curd.
At last the evil people,
Worn out by her resistance,
Flung back her penny, kicked their
fruit
Along whichever road they took,
Not leaving root or stone or shoot;
Some writhed into the ground,
Some dived into the brook
With ring and ripple,
Some scudded on the gale without a
sound,
Some vanished in the distance.

In a smart, ache, tingle,
Lizzie went her way;
Knew not was it night or day;
Sprang up the bank, tore thro' the
furze,
Threaded copse and dingle,
And heard her penny jingle
Bouncing in her purse,—
Its bounce was music to her ear.
She ran and ran
As if she feared some goblin man
Dogged her with gibe or curse
Or something worse:
But not one goblin skurried after,
Nor was she pricked by fear;
The kind heart made her windy-paced
That urged her home quite out of
breath with haste
And inward laughter.

She cried, 'Laura,' up the garden,
'Did you miss me?
Come and kiss me.
Never mind my bruises,
Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
Eat me, drink me, love me;
Laura, make much of me;
For your sake I have braved the glen
And had to do with goblin merchant
men.'

Laura started from her chair,
Flung her arms up in the air,
Clutched her hair:
'Lizzie, Lizzie, have you tasted
For my sake the fruit forbidden?
Must your light like mine be hidden,
Your young life like mine be wasted,
Undone in mine undoing,
And ruined in my ruin,
Thirsty, cankered, goblin-ridden?'—
She clung about her sister,
Kissed and kissed and kissed her:
Tears once again
Refreshed her shrunken eyes,
Dropping like rain
After long sultry drouth;
Shaking with aguish fear, and pain,
She kissed and kissed her with a
hungry mouth.

Her lips began to scorch,
That juice was wormwood to her
tongue,
She loathed the feast:
Writhing as one possessed she leaped
and sung,
Rent all her robe, and wrung

Her hands in lamentable haste,
And beat her breast.
Her locks streamed like the torch
Borne by a racer at full speed,
Or like the mane of horses in their flight,
Or like an eagle when she stems the light
Straight toward the sun,
Or like a caged thing freed,
Or like a flying flag when armies run.

Swift fire spread through her veins, knocked at her heart,
Met the fire smouldering there
And overbore its lesser flame;
She gorged on bitterness without a name:
Ah fool, to choose such part
Of soul-consuming care!
Sense failed in the mortal strife:
Like the watch-tower of a town
Which an earthquake shatters down,
Like a lightning-stricken mast,
Like a wind-uprooted tree
Spun about,
Like a foam-topped waterspout
Cast down headlong in the sea,
She fell at last;
Pleasure past and anguish past,
Is it death or is it life?

Life out of death.
That night long Lizzie watched by her,
Counted her pulse's flagging stir,
Felt for her breath,
Held water to her lips, and cooled her face
With tears and fanning leaves.
But when the first birds chirped about their eaves,
And early reapers plodded to the place
Of golden sheaves,
And dew-wet grass
Bowed in the morning winds so brisk to pass,
And new buds with new day
Opened of cup-like lilies on the stream,
Laura awoke as from a dream,
Laughed in the innocent old way,
Hugged Lizzie but not twice or thrice;
Her gleaming locks showed not one thread of grey,
Her breath was sweet as May,
And light danced in her eyes.

Days, weeks, months, years
Afterwards, when both were wives
With children of their own;
Their mother-hearts beset with fears,
Their lives bound up in tender lives;
Laura would call the little ones
And tell them of her early prime,
Those pleasant days long gone
Of not-returning time:
Would talk about the haunted glen,
The wicked quaint fruit-merchant men,
Their fruits like honey to the throat
But poison in the blood
(Men sell not such in any town):
Would tell them how her sister stood
In deadly peril to do her good,
And win the fiery antidote:
Then joining hands to little hands
Would bid them cling together,—
'For there is no friend like a sister
In calm or stormy weather;
To cheer one on the tedious way,
To fetch one if one goes astray,
To lift one if one totters down,
To strengthen whilst one stands.'

27 April 1859.

REPINING

SHE sat alway through the long day
Spinning the weary thread away;
And ever said in undertone,
'Come, that I be no more alone.'

From early dawn to set of sun
Working, her task was still undone;
And the long thread seemed to increase
Even while she spun and did not cease.
She heard the gentle turtle-dove
Tell to its mate a tale of love;
She saw the glancing swallows fly,
Ever a social company;
She knew each bird upon its nest
Had cheering songs to bring it rest;
None lived alone save only she:—
The wheel went round more wearily;
She wept and said in undertone,
'Come, that I be no more alone.'

Day followed day and still she sighed
For love, and was not satisfied;
Until one night, when the moonlight
Turned all the trees to silver-white,
She heard, what ne'er she heard before,
A steady hand undo the door.
The nightingale since set of sun
Her throbbing music had not done,
And she had listened silently;
But now the wind had changed, and she
Heard the sweet song no more, but heard
Beside her bed a whispered word:
'Damsel, rise up; be not afraid;
For I am come at last,' it said.

She trembled, though the voice was mild;
She trembled like a frightened child;—
Till she looked up, and then she saw
The unknown speaker without awe.
He seemed a fair young man, his eyes
Beaming with serious charities;
His cheek was white but hardly pale;
And a dim glory like a veil
Hovered about his head, and shone
Through the whole room till night was gone.

So her fear fled; and then she said,
Leaning upon her quiet bed:
'Now thou art come, I prythee stay,
That I may see thee in the day,
And learn to know thy voice, and hear
It evermore calling me near.'

He answered, 'Rise and follow me.
But she looked upwards wonderingly:
'And whither wouldst thou go, friend? stay
Until the dawning of the day.'
But he said: 'The wind ceaseth, Maid;
Of chill nor damp be thou afraid.'

She bound her hair up from the floor,
And passed in silence from the door.

So they went forth together, he
Helping her forward tenderly.
The hedges bowed beneath his hand;
Forth from the streams came the dry land
As they passed over; evermore
The pallid moonbeams shone before;
And the wind hushed, and nothing stirred;

SISTER MAUDE

WHO told my mother of my shame,
Who told my father of my dear?
Oh who but Maude, my sister Maude,
Who lurked to spy and peer.

Cold he lies, as cold as stone,
With his clotted curls about his face:
The comeliest corpse in all the world
And worthy of a queen's embrace.

You might have spared his soul, sister,
Have spared my soul, your own soul too:
Though I had not been born at all,
He'd never have looked at you.

My father may sleep in Paradise,
My mother at Heaven-gate:
But sister Maude shall get no sleep
Either early or late.

My father may wear a golden gown,
My mother a crown may win;
If my dear and I knocked at Heaven-gate
Perhaps they'd let us in:
But sister Maude, O sister Maude,
Bide *you* with death and sin.

Circa 1860.

NOBLE SISTERS

'NOW did you mark a falcon,
Sister dear, sister dear,
Flying toward my window
In the morning cool and clear?
With jingling bells about her neck,
But what beneath her wing?
It may have been a ribbon,
Or it may have been a ring.'—
'I marked a falcon swooping
At the break of day:
And for your love, my sister dove,
I 'frayed the thief away.'—

'Or did you spy a ruddy hound,
Sister fair and tall,
Went snuffing round my garden bound,
Or crouched by my bower wall?
With a silken leash about his neck;
But in his mouth may be
A chain of gold and silver links,
Or a letter writ to me.'—
'I heard a hound, highbor sister,
Stood baying at the moon:
I rose and drove him from your wall
Lest you should wake too soon.'—

'Or did you meet a pretty page
Sat swinging on the gate?
Sat whistling whistling like a bird,
Or may be slept too late:
With eaglets broidered on his cap
And eaglets on his glove.
If you had turned his pockets out,
You had found some pledge of love.'—
'I met him at this daybreak,
Scarce the east was red:
Lest the creaking gate should anger you
I packed him home to bed.'—

'Oh patience, sister! Did you see
A young man tall and strong,
Swift-footed to uphold the right
And to uproot the wrong,

Come home across the desolate sea
To woo me for his wife?
And in his heart my heart is locked,
And in his life my life.'—
'I met a nameless man, sister,
Who loitered round our door:
I said: Her husband loves her much
And yet she loves him more.'—

'Fie, sister, fie, a wicked lie,
A lie, a wicked lie!
I have none other love but him,
Nor will have till I die.
And you have turned him from our door,
And stabbed him with a lie:
I will go seek him thro' the world
In sorrow till I die.'—
'Go seek in sorrow, sister,
And find in sorrow too:
If thus you shame our father's name
My curse go forth with you.'

Towards January 1860.

'NO, THANK YOU, JOHN'

I NEVER said I loved you, John;
Why will you tease me day by day,
And wax a weariness to think upon
With always 'do' and 'pray'?

You know I never loved you, John;
No fault of mine made me your toast:
Why will you haunt me with a face as wan
As shows an hour-old ghost?

I dare say Meg or Moll would take
Pity upon you, if you'd ask:
And pray don't remain single for my sake
Who can't perform that task.

I have no heart?—Perhaps I have not;
But then you're mad to take offence
That I don't give you what I have not got:
Use your own common sense.

Let bygones be bygones:
Don't call me false, who owed not to be true:
I'd rather answer 'No' to fifty Johns
Than answer 'Yes' to you.

Let's mar our pleasant days no more,
Song-birds of passage, days of youth:
Catch at to-day, forget the days before;
I'll wink at your untruth.

Let us strike hands as hearty friends;
No more, no less; and friendship's good:
Only don't keep in view ulterior ends,
And points not understood

In open treaty. Rise above
Quibbles and shuffling off and on.
Here's friendship for you if you like; but love,—
No, thank you, John.

27 *March* 1860.

MIRAGE

THE hope I dreamed of was a dream,
Was but a dream; and now I wake,
Exceeding comfortless, and worn, and old,
For a dream's sake.

I hang my harp upon a tree,
A weeping willow in a lake;
I hang my silenced harp there, wrung and snapt
For a dream's sake.

Lie still, lie still, my breaking heart;
My silent heart, lie still and break:
Life, and the world, and mine own self, are changed
For a dream's sake.

12 *June* 1860.

THE LAMBS OF GRASMERE, 1860

THE upland flocks grew starved and thinned:
Their shepherds scarce could feed the lambs
Whose milkless mothers butted them,
Or who were orphaned of their dams.
The lambs athirst for mother's milk
Filled all the place with piteous sounds:
Their mothers' bones made white for miles
The pastureless wet pasture grounds.

Day after day, night after night,
From lamb to lamb the shepherds went,
With teapots for the bleating mouths,
Instead of nature's nourishment.
The little shivering gaping things
Soon knew the step that brought them aid,
And fondled the protecting hand,
And rubbed it with a woolly head.

Then, as the days waxed on to weeks,
It was a pretty sight to see
These lambs with frisky heads and tails
Skipping and leaping on the lea,
Bleating in tender trustful tones,
Resting on rocky crag or mound,
And following the beloved feet
That once had sought for them and found.

These very shepherds of their flocks
These loving lambs so meek to please,
Are worthy of recording words
And honour in their due degrees.
So I might live a hundred years,
And roam from strand to foreign strand,
Yet not forget this flooded spring
And scarce-saved lambs of Westmoreland.

24 *July* 1860.

PROMISES LIKE PIE-CRUST

PROMISE me no promises,
So will I not promise you:
Keep we both our liberties,
Never false and never true:
Let us hold the die uncast,
Free to come as free to go:
For I cannot know your past,
And of mine what can you know?

You, so warm, may once have been
Warmer towards another one:
I, so cold, may once have seen
Sunlight, once have felt the sun:
Who shall show us if it was
Thus indeed in time of old?
Fades the image from the glass,
And the fortune is not told.

If you promised, you might grieve
For lost liberty again:
If I promised, I believe
I should fret to break the chain.
Let us be the friends we were,
Nothing more but nothing less:
Many thrive on frugal fare
Who would perish of excess.

20 *April* 1861.

WIFE TO HUSBAND

PARDON the faults in me,
For the love of years ago:
Good-bye.
I must drift across the sea,
I must sink into the snow,
I must die.

You can bask in this sun,
You can drink wine, and eat:
Good-bye.
I must gird myself and run,
Though with unready feet:
I must die.

Blank sea to sail upon,
Cold bed to sleep in:
Good-bye.
While you clasp, I must be gone
For all your weeping:
I must die.

A kiss for one friend,
And a word for two,—
Good-bye:—
A lock that you must send,
A kindness you must do:
I must die.

Not a word for you,
Not a lock or kiss,
Good-bye.
We, one, must part in two;
Verily death is this:
I must die.

8 *June* 1861.

BETTER SO

FAST asleep, mine own familiar friend,
Fast asleep at last:
Though the pain was strong,
Though the struggle long,
It is past:
All thy pangs are at an end.

Whilst I weep, whilst death-bells toll,
Thou art fast asleep,
With idle hands upon thy breast
And heart at rest:
Whilst I weep
Angels sing around thy singing soul.

I would not speak the word if I could raise
My dead to life:
I would not speak
If I could flush thy cheek
And rouse thy pulses' strife
And send thy feet on the once-trodden ways.

13 *December* 1861.

WHO SHALL SAY?

I TOILED on, but thou
Wast weary of the way,
And so we parted: now
Who shall say
Which is happier—I or thou?

I am weary now
On the solitary way:
But art thou rested, thou?
Who shall say
Which of us is calmer now?

Still my heart's love, thou,
In thy secret way,
Art still remembered now:
Who shall say—
Still rememberest thou?

Circa 1884.

ONE SWALLOW DOES NOT MAKE A SUMMER

A ROSE which spied one Swallow
Made haste to blush and blow:
'Others are sure to follow':
Ah no, not so!
The wandering clouds still owe
A few fresh flakes of snow,
Chill fog must fill the hollow,
Before the bird-stream flow
In flood across the main,
And Winter's woe
End in glad Summer come again.
Then thousand flowers may blossom
by the shore,—
But that Rose never more.

Before 1886.

A FROG'S FATE

CONTEMPTUOUS of his home beyond
The village and the village-pond,
A large-souled Frog who spurned
each byeway
Hopped along the imperial highway.

Nor grunting pig nor barking dog
Could disconcert so great a Frog.
The morning dew was lingering yet,
His sides to cool, his tongue to
wet:
The night-dew, when the night
should come,
A travelled Frog would send him
home.

Not so, alas! The wayside grass
Sees him no more: not so, alas!
A broad-wheeled waggon unaware
Ran him down, his joys, his cares,
From dying choke one feeble croak
The Frog's perpetual silence broke:—
'Ye buoyant Frogs, ye great and
small,
Even I am mortal after all!
My road to fame turns out a wry
way;
I perish on the hideous highway;
Oh for my old familiar byeway!'

The choking Frog sobbed and was
gone;
The Waggoner strode whistling on
Unconscious of the carnage done,
Whistling that Waggoner strode
on—
Whistling (it may have happened so)
'A froggy would a-wooing go.'
A hypothetic frog trolled he,
Obtuse to a reality.

Rich and poor, O great and small,
Such oversights beset us all.
The mangled Frog abides incog,
The uninteresting actual frog:
The hypothetic frog alone
Is the one frog we dwell upon.

Before 1886.

'THERE IS A BUDDING MORROW IN MIDNIGHT'

WINTRY boughs against a wintry
sky;
Yet the sky is partly blue
And the clouds are partly
bright:—
Who can tell but sap is mounting
high
Out of sight,
Ready to burst through?

Winter is the mother-nurse of Spring,
Lovely for her daughter's sake,
Not unlovely for her own:
For a future buds in everything;
Grown, or blown,
Or about to break.

Before 1890.

THE WAY OF THE WORLD

BOAT that sails upon the sea,
Sails far and far and far away:
To sail in her sing songs of glee,
Or watch and pray.

Boat that drifts upon the sea,
Silent and void to sun and air:
Who sailed in her have ended glee
And watch and prayer.

Circa 1890.

A HELPMEET FOR HIM

WOMAN was made for man's delight;
Charm, O woman, be not afraid!
His shadow by day, his moon by
night,
Woman was made.

Her strength with weakness is over-
laid;
Meek compliances veil her might;
Him she stays by whom she is stayed.

World-wide champion of truth and
right,
Hope in gloom and in danger aid,
Tender and faithful, ruddy and
white,
Woman was made.

Before 1891.

EXULTATE DEO

MANY a flower hath perfume for its
dower,
And many a bird a song,
And harmless lambs milkwhite
beside their dams
Frolic along;
Perfume and song and whiteness
offering praise
In humble peaceful ways.

Man's high degree hath will and
memory,
Affection and desire,
By loftier ways he mounts of prayer
and praise;
Fire unto fire,
Deep unto deep responsive, height
to height,
Until he walk in white.

Before 1891.